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# A WHITE BABY



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**"LIKE A SILVER CROSS DIVINELY JEWELLED."**

**—Page 189.**







# A White Baby

BY  
JAMES WELSH

*WITH FRONTISPIECE BY*  
WILLIAM A. McCULLOUGH

New York and London  
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# A WHITE BABY.

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## CHAPTER I.

“Now den, child’n, an’ all on yo’, try jes’ once mo’—try jes’ once mo’ to say de tree las’ letters. Try fo’ to say ’em all togedder, an’ soft an’ slow, jes’ like yo’ heahs me do. Now, d’yo’ hear me dar, yo’ boys an’ gals on de back row? We’s gwine say aix, y, zee once mo’. Now, ’tenshin; now all togedder—Aix!”

The speaker was a tall and handsome negro girl of just eighteen. Her scholars were negroes of both sexes and of almost all ages—toothless old men and women, whose sunken eyes were brightened by no

gleam of hope, and whose shriveled faces bore no trace of rest; rough-looking, stout men and women of middle age; young men and maidens, casting bashful glances at each other, giggling, and treading on each other's toes; little boys and little girls, with great dancing orbs and glistening white teeth; babies even—jolly, half-naked, fat little persons, crowing and crawling about everybody's feet.

But except in color, and to a certain extent also in speech, there was between the teacher and her pupils hardly any resemblance. For while Loo Adams—for that was the teacher's name, and this was her night school—for while Loo Adams, I say, had the soft, voluptuous form, and the ease of movement, and the grace of manner, and the low, sweet voice, and the clearly-marked features of a pure-bred Nubian, the others had scarcely any clearly-marked fea-

tures or distinctive character at all. They were negroes, but they were not African negroes. Their original characteristics had been almost entirely obliterated by generations of mixing. They were quite an American manufacture. And consequently, although there were among them many shades of brown, there was not one who came within many shades of black,

Little Widder Wyning, for instance, who always sat so mute and watchful at the head of the class—little Widder Wyning, in the white muslin frock and smart pink bows—she was really on the white side of yellow. But Loo was as black as the sloe. And in the light of the flaring lamp which she held in front of the broken blackboard, her face shone like polished ebony. She was unlike her neighbors, too, in dress. Perhaps no colored woman in the two Carolinas dressed exactly as she did. Working or not

working, she never wore any other kind of frock than a short, well-fitting black merino, with purest white frilling in the neck and the sleeves. To be sure, her work now consisted merely in superintending others at the washtub and ironing board. She had the laundry work of all the principal hotels in Charleston and of all the steamboats that came from Europe.

And at eighteen Loo Adams was as staid as a woman of forty—well, no, not a woman of forty, a woman of sixty rather; because, when one thinks of it aright, women of forty are at the loveliest and most adorable period of life, and staid not at all, or only in bewitching pretense, or as occasion demands, which but deepens the subtle charm of the picture. For, consider her paintings and books at that age, and how dexterously she handles the knottiest of questions and the naughtiest of men! And Loo

Adams was wiser than Solomon, Pine Open said. Marl Flats said exactly the same.

Pine Open was the village where Loo Adams had always lived, and Marl Flats was a strange field of labor, on the Ashley River, two or three miles away. It was a field of labor where three hundred men, who had once been slaves, worked pretty much as they pleased. And their minister, the Rev. Abram White, worked among them with pick and spade, and generally without a shirt. He was a gigantic young man, with a seamed and aged face, and in the sun his glistening black back had the appearance of having been stamped with a network of red-hot iron.

A few miles from Charleston, and standing well back from the deep and sandy main road, there stood not long ago the ruins of a wealthy planter's home. Like very many other fine old mansions, it had suf-



ferred severely in the war. But it suffered far more severely at the end of the war, when it became a mere rookery of half-starved and half-naked negroes. At the rear of this house stood Loo's pretty white and green cottage, sheltered by a venerable and wide-spreading tree. It was there Loo Adams was born. And under the watchful care of her dearly-loved mistress she had grown up into the girl she was—a girl who would bend neither to this side nor that of truth and right. Mother or sister or brother she had now none, and her father had fallen in battle. Nor had she now a mistress, for a few hours after the news was brought in that the husband had laid down his life for the Confederacy her mistress died. Thus, you perceive, the poor young girl had neither outward help nor stay of any kind. But she had courage and perseverance of a high order, winning manners, and a most kind

heart. Above all, she had a spotless name. Accordingly she prospered, and in her prosperity many a helpless colored sister prospered too.

There had always been a night-school at Pine Open, and when her mistress died, Loo did her best to carry it on. There was no reward, except the reward that lay in the work itself; but it was enough to know that she was perpetuating the work her mistress had begun. Loo asked for nothing more. And so, night after night, week after week, month after month, all through the last two years, had this brave negro maiden laid aside her large white bib-apron, locked up her cottage, closed the green shutters, and, tripping lightly across the great weedy courtyard, opened the old ball room door, and set up the black-board, and lit the fire, and arranged the forms, and hung up the lights, and labored with might and main to

drive a little learning into those hard woolly heads.

“But it ain’ all no use, child’n,” she went on, “yo’ can’t learn nuttin’. What yo’ learns one minnit yo’ fo’gits anudder minnit. Now all togedder once mo’—Aix !”

“I guess we’d learn quicker’n nuttin’ ef yo’ was to skip de a, b, c’s, an’ begin further on, Loo Adams.”

So said a tall rickety boy at the back of the class, taking his thumb out of his mouth to say so. Loo Adams stepped up swiftly to the front of the class, and in the light of the pine knot which she held above her head, looked searchingly into the faces of the lads in the back row.

“Who dat call me Loo—Loo Adams?” she demanded angrily. “Who dat, I say, call me Loo—Loo Adams?”

But no one replied. A dead silence fell upon the class. The grown folks shifted uneasily on

the forms, and the young ones glanced at each other timidly. But no one replied. Loo Adams was angry, and they had never seen Loo Adams downright angry before. With a few exceptions, both old and young were greatly attached to Loo, yet every soul there knew that their teacher that night was to be deliberately and openly insulted. Unless they were duped, and made to believe that what was about to be done was neither more nor less than an uncommonly daring joke, their conduct seems incapable of any solution. But the moment they saw the effect of the sting, the pain it caused, the anger it roused, they felt abashed and afraid. And although nobody replied to Loo's trembling demand, it was easy to fix on the delinquent, for Moses Smith, with his thumb in his mouth, was making desperate efforts to hide behind a boy not half his size.

“Aha, Mo’ Smiff,” said Loo

severely, "I know'd it was yo'." And catching up her skirt, and holding the flaring light high aloft, she swept round to the rear of the class, and led the unhappy young Mo' back to the front by the ear.

"Now, jes' stan' dar," she said, backing the whimpering and now truly alarmed Moses up against the blackboard. "I'se gwine to make yo' do sometin' what's mighty hard to do—I'se gwine to make yo' speak de troof, Mo' Smiff. De A'mighty's gib me a claim on yo', an' I'se gwine to put it in."

Now whether poor Mo' was horrified that Loo had a claim and meant to put it in, or whether from the angry light in her eyes he was convinced that she meant to hit him on the nose with the blazing pine knot, it would be hard to say ; but, anyhow, he put up his elbow and fairly howled again. And the howling and the attitude of the slender six-foot criminal were just too much

for the gravity of any negro that ever lived. Very hard did the scholars look into the young teacher's eyes, and when out of those eyes, that ever looked so pityingly upon them in all their little trials, they saw the angry light die away, they laughed and clapped their hands and yelled, and jumped up and sat down, and the youngsters danced and tumbled over the forms and rolled each other about the floor until they gasped for breath. But in her quiet ordering way Loo quickly marshaled her simple-minded, sunny-natured, ill-clad, half-starved pupils back to their places. She marshaled them back, not because any more lessons were to be done, but because that outspoken young savage, Mo' Smiff, had brought a question to the front which the energetic young teacher was determined should be thrashed out there and then, and settled once for all that night.

The question to be settled once for all was not now merely the old and irritating question whether at lesson-time Loo was to be called Miss Adams, or Miss Loo, or Miss Loo Adams in full, though it cannot be denied that it trenched dangerously near to that extremely delicate ground. No. It was a question involving far wider interests. In the whole wide world there was to young Loo Adams but one Abram White. And in the whole wide world, rumor said, there was but one Abram White to little Widder Wyning. It was Pine Open rumor that said this, of course ; but it admitted quite frankly that what Loo wanted and what Widder Wyning wanted were totally different things. Loo wanted Abram ; Widder Wyning wanted the minister.

Of the preachers of the Gospel since times Apostolic, one of the lowliest of all was indisputably the

Rev. Abram White. He had seen his father legally sold into the East. He had seen his mother legally sold into the West, his brothers into the North, and his sisters into the South. God knows, he was lowly enough in that. And like the bale of cotton which he picked on the uplands, or the bag of rice which he filled on the malarious plains, he had himself legally changed hands three or four times. God knows, he was lowly enough in that. He was able to read a little, but he could not write. He was very poor, for since the ruin of the Whites in the war his occupation was almost gone. He was perfectly aware—for the world of science lost no opportunity of dinning it into his ears—that his skull was much thicker than a white man's skull, that his brains were much lighter than a white man's brains, and that his skin was much tougher than a white man's skin, and generally very



evil-smelling, and always distinctly velvety to the touch. Moreover, it had also been always dinned into his ears that of all the millions of negroes that had stepped on American soil, not one had risen to eminence in literature, science, or art, and accordingly that he would only accentuate and illustrate the racial folly if he ever cherished one noble aspiration for himself. Besides, as he was unselfishly told, colored talent was not in demand. The country was crowded with pure white talent of its own. And in addition to all this his glistening black back was netted with the awful cross-plowings of the lash. And, God knows, the poor minister was lowly enough in that. Such, then, was the man that Loo Adams loved—the merest, vaguest outside of him rather : as for the inside of him, we shall see him in the all-revealing hour of a deep inarticulate suffering, a suffering infinitely pitiful,

like the suffering of the beast that is dumb.

For a young woman of color, especially for a young widow of color, Widder Wyning was well-to-do in the world. She kept the only grocery store in the neighborhood, and in her own small way she prospered. Now in her heart the widow desired the minister. Openly and in secret she had angled for him in all kinds of ways and in all kinds of waters. Every known kind of hook had she baited with every known kind of bait. A little of this fishing was occasionally seen by the whole female population of Pine Open, and at all such times Pine Open became duly excited. Loo Adams, to be sure, saw it all—from the tying of the hook, to the dangling of the bait before the unsuspecting Abram's nose.

Now, if only that odious Widder Wyning kept a store in some other part of the little wicked colored

world, cried Loo many a night into her pillow, or if only Widder Wying had been an old widow instead of being such a young widow, or if only she had been ugly or only merely plain, or if only she had been a little bit more white or a little bit more black, or a little bit richer or a little bit poorer, or not quite so slender or not quite so small, or if only, when she spoke to the minister, she would speak in her natural voice and not coo like the dove—and oh ! if she would not try so to make her poor Abram believe that she was nothing but sugar and cream ! However, there was no help for it now. Mo' Smiff had brought the question to the front, and it must be thrashed out there and then.

“Now den, Mo' Smiff,” said Loo sternly, as she twisted the culprit round to meet her eye to eye, “jes' yo' say why yo' 'sulted de class by not sayin' Miff to de teacher. Don'

yo' know it's de rule to speak 'spec'fully of all teachers, pastors, an' masters, don' yo', Mo'?"

Mo' whimpered a little, and admitted the rule; but why he insulted the class, as Loo put it, he declined to say. There was a deep silence in the class, and the strong red light from the fire flickered curiously upon the rows of black eager faces.

"Now, jes' tink, Mo'. Smiff—an' take dat fum out'n yo' mouf," said Loo softly. "Jes' yo' tink an' tell me dis—tell me was yo' fader once at deff's door wid de smallpox, an' yo' mudder at deff's door, too, an' all yo' brudders, an' all yo' sisters, an' de baby, all on yo' all at de same time?"

Mo' hung his head and shrank into less room.

"Dat's so, Miff Loo," he said sadly, "daddy an' mammy an' all on us was took de same time." And then suddenly straightening

himself up, he said in quite a determined, manly voice, "Ef yo' wants to stick my darn'd haid in dat roastin'-hot fire, Miff Loo, yo' can."

"An' when dey was sick," continued Loo, not heeding Mo's offer to be made a burnt sacrifice, "jes' one woman out'n all Pine Open—jes' one po' woman 'tended 'pon yo' daddy an' mammy an' all de rest, 'tended 'pon dem all boaf night an' day right straight troo from de beginnin' to de end. An' dat one po' woman bought all de medcin, an' all de food, an' left her work because dey might hab died."

Mo' Smiff was tearing at his old felt hat with his strong white teeth, and feeling desperate.

"Ef yo' wants to stick my darn'd haid in dat roastin'-hot fire, Miff Loo," he said chokingly, "yo' can."

"An' one boy in dat house o' 'fiction," said Loo, paying no

attention, "was wuss den all de rest. I tink dat boy was in de grave, though I 'spec he didn' jes' touch de boddom. I reckon," she continued softly, "dat de A'mighty mus' ha' been tired hear'n me pray fo' dat po' family. But all de same, when I see dat boy was gwine to die, I jes' jump up 'mong all dem po' mad ravin' fever folks, an' scream, scream, scream, wid my hands 'gainst de ceilin' fo' de Lord to hold dat po' boy back. An' de Lord did. Does yo' know dat boy, Mo' Smiff?"

"Does I know him, Miff Loo," groaned Mo', dashing his limp old hat to the ground, and rolling up his tattered shirt-sleeves in a fury, "does I know de cuss, Miff Loo? does I know de skunk, Miff Loo? Does I? does I? does I?" and, amid the wildest excitement and yelling of the youngsters, he clutched himself savagely by the wool, dragged down his head, and

pummeled it fast and furiously with his fist until he grew daft and dizzy, and fell crashing with the blackboard and its rickety piled-up stand to the floor. The uproar at the end of the fight was deafening. But the moment Mo' scrambled to his feet it stopped—in breathless expectation, perhaps, that Mo' and himself would have another round.

“Yis, I knows dat boy, Miff Loo,” said Mo', gasping; “I knows him, an' sho' 'nuff de A'mighty hab gib yo' a ciaim on me, an' ef yo' wants to stick my darn'd haid——”

“Den who tol' yo' to call me Loo Adam 'fo' all de class?” Mo' hung his head, and slowly and prudently began nibbling at his thumb.

“I don't want fo' to tell no names, Miff Loo. She tol' me not to tell. An' she gib me a'mos' half a glass ob ale not to tell, an' a han'ful o' crackers, an' a mighty big heap o' raisins out'n de shop-windey.”

There was a movement and buzz-

ing of surprise in the class, which might easily have led a stranger to suppose that the information was quite new. There being only one shop-window, however, in all Pine Open, and only a single patron with crackers and raisins and limited ale in her gift, the mention of a name would have added nothing to the revelation.

Widder Wyning, as we know, always attended the class, and as no one disputed her right she always sat at the head. Now at the very first mention of crackers and ale every eye in the room was turned in Widder Wyning's direction.

"It's a lie!" said Widder Wyning, suddenly rising to her feet, and as suddenly sinking down again; "an' he stole boaf de crackers an' de raisins an' de ale!"

"Steal!" cried Mo' indignantly. "Yo' say I stole dem tings? No! De boys is heah what seed yo' gib dem to me. Look roun'!" But



Widder Wyning felt there was fixed upon her a battery of questioning eyes, and she turned away her head. "An' yo' done nuttin' but talk about de minister all de time I was in yo' ole shop."

"A lie !" muttered the widow, clasping her little yellow hands over her knee and defiantly dancing her foot, "a lie !"

"Ah ! Den look roun' at de folks ef it's a lie," retorted Mo', with a malicious grin. "An' yo' said yo' would gib mo' den yo' ole store was wuff ef de minister was jes' walk in an' ax yo' to be him wife, Widder Wyning."

"A lie, a lie !" she growled,—and you could hear her teeth,—“a lie, a dam lie !”

And she faced round suddenly, in a way that made the youngsters shrink.

"Lie ? No !" returned Mo', taking a step toward the widow and raising his voice to an angry shout.

“ An’ yo’ ax me to take some new black gloves to de minister wid yo’ complemens, an’ jes’ befo’ yo’ put de gloves in de box yo’ kiss’d all de fingers an’ fums o’ boaf hans.”

Widder Wyning swore savagely, and springing to her feet, and shaking down her hair, she made a dash for Mo’. But she stopped suddenly and recoiled, fixing her blazing eyes on something above Loo’s head. It was the minister himself. Like lightning, Widder Wyning saw that her cause was lost. The minister had heard her swear!

The Rev. Abram White was a very tall, very spare-looking man, wearing shabby, ill-fitting black clothes and the white tie. He appeared to be forty years of age, but as a matter of fact he was only twenty-five. His face was deeply marked with bygone sickness, want, and suffering. Holding his nearly napless silk hat carefully by the brim, he came slowly forward, laid

his large hand gently on Loo's shoulder, and looked down into her eyes. Widder Wyning saw it all; she felt it all. It was a look to drive every other woman to despair; it drove Widder Wyning mad. Taking one step forward, she bent down and spat twice at Loo's feet; and then, sinking down on one knee, she smote wildly upon the floor with her small clenched hand, shrieking as she smote, "Cuss yo'! Cuss yo'! Cuss yo'!"

"Sister, sister!" cried the minister imploringly, as he stooped to raise her up.

"Cuss yo'!" she shrieked, springing away from his touch. And leaping upon Mo' Smiff unawares, she hurled him headlong into the fire, and then fled swiftly out into the night. Yes, that look of the minister's almost drove her mad. And happy would it have been both for herself and for others had her reason really for a time departed

from her altogether. For Widder Wyning became a devil.

Hitherto at the end of the lesson it had been the custom for the class to sing a hymn, say the Lord's Prayer, and depart with the minister's blessing. For the minister was always there. He arrived, as a rule, a minute or two before the lesson was finished. Here and there, of course, it was whispered that this punctuality was traceable to the presence of Loo. But generally a wider charity prevailed. After his long day's toil in the marl pits the Rev. Abram would, it was believed, have dressed himself with the same scrupulous care, and have trudged with the same unflagging cheerfulness through the same wide breadth of dark swampy forest, to sing a hymn or say a prayer with that queer little class, or do any other bit of good, as if Loo Adams had been a quantity quite unknown.

But on this most memorable night

there was neither hymn nor benediction. For the meeting broke up in the wildest excitement. The grown-up folks rushed away to tell their neighbors, while the boys and girls dashed after Mo', for Mo' had declared that he would take his revenge out of each and all of Widder Wyning's windows.

Loo and the minister were now alone. Side by side they stood silently watching the dying embers on the hearth, and listening to the shouts and laughter of the children. Somehow their hands touched. And then—somehow—their fingers became locked together. The shouts and laughter grew fainter and fainter in the distance, and on the hearth one tiny spark lingered longer than the rest; suddenly it grew larger, glowed beautifully for a moment, and went out. Whispering to each other softly, Abram and Loo moved slowly toward the open door, and

there, bathed in the soft moonlight, they stood hand in hand, reading into each other's eyes. Presently, and always hand in hand, they passed out into the silvery haze, passed out into a golden world beyond, out into a hallowed world, a world ever new and ever old, a world of unclouded love and hope and peace and joy. They were of the lowliest of the earth. But in that bright sphere of love they were linked to all time and akin to all the world. Their color was forgotten, and thickness of skin was not laid to their charge. Heavenly pity gave them loving hearts, and they loved one another, and confessed their love; and their love, as it seemed, transfigured them. And concerning the hearts that Heavenly pity gave them, science reluctantly admits that they are human after all, and that they even beat the universal standard number of beats to a minute.

## CHAPTER II.

MARL FLATS, we know, was the place where Abram White earned his daily bread. As the minister of Pine Open he earned nothing. And in its everyday normal condition Marl Flats was as uninviting a field of labor as the world at that time could show. One would not, of course, compare it to certain spots on the Pacific slope or to certain spots in New South Wales. The gold fields there and every where were mere volcanic hells. Marl Flats, however, was not a hell. It lacked the elements of a true old hell; it lacked the gold. But it was far indeed from being a heaven, notwithstanding.

Marl Flats was a great square clearing, falling away with a considerable drop to the Ashley River.

Standing with your back to the steep muddy banks of the stream, you saw that the other three sides of the square were bounded by dense, unbroken virgin forest. Here once upon a time was grown the finest Carolina rice. But now the clearing looked like the ground of some vast new cemetery, full of innumerable graves, newly dug for the innumerable dying, together with innumerable mounds roughly covering the innumerable dead. Only, instead of being green and waving, the mounds were all whitey-brown clay, and the graves were all full of water covered with green miasma slime. Why the people who dug those pits should make them exactly the length of a grave and exactly as wide, it would be hard to say. The uniformity was really striking, because there was no supervision. A man might dig where he pleased. The possessor of a pick, a spade, and a



barrow might walk on to the ground, select a spot, and begin to make money at once. No one asked him for his character, and he might begin early and work late, like the half-dozen white men, or begin late and knock off early, like the two or three hundred negroes. And the thing they dug for was called marl, and it lay under the whitey-brown clay on a clay of the most delicate blue. But everywhere this marl bore a marvelous resemblance to organic remains and everywhere it was on a level with the bed of the river, so that the farther you went from the river the deeper you must dig for your marl, which most profitable fact was known to the half-dozen white men, and to the negroes not at all. And when this marl was loaded into trucks, and hauled down to the steam washer by mules, and washed, it was shot down into the hold of a tiny schooner

in the river below, where it looked, people said, like nothing on earth but a cargo of clean old bones. Wicked folks said the marl was converted by quite a new process into actual spice of Arabia. But the contractor who shipped it away maintained that its use was strictly confined to husbandry.

Widder Wyning's extraordinary behavior spurred Loo and Abram on. In a fortnight they were married. And on the evening of their wedding-day Marl Flats presented a very unusual sight. The sight that Marl Flats usually presented was that of two or three hundred negroes busily engaged in scrambling into holes or scrambling out of them, or digging marl or shoveling marl, or wheeling marl or filling trucks, or fighting for mules, or singing hymns together or swearing together, or praying together or drinking together, playing cards, rattling dice, howling

comic songs, and firing off their old Minie rifles whenever the spirit moved them. A few of these men were decent, and a few had decent homes. But a very large number were not decent, and had no homes at all. They lived in the dark oozy woods. They built themselves huts of boughs, and herded together like beasts. They slept on beds of poisonous leaves, they drank poisonous water, they ate poisonous food. They never changed their clothes, they never washed their bodies, they never combed their hair. Saddest of all, babies were born there, and babies died there; but how they were buried, or whether they were buried at all, I do not know.

And Loo's wedding day was also pay day, and pay day at Marl Flats was always a great day indeed. Now, as pay day came once every fortnight, it is evident there must have been many great days in the

season of work. To be sure, the season was not long, for when the weather grew hot the managers, who were white men from the North, put up the shutters and went off home. But on those famous pay days thrifty mammies and aunties, with gay turbans and piled-up baskets of curious eatables and drinkables, came in to Marl Flats from every point of the compass. Miles away from Marl Flats the drowsy stillness of the early morning would suddenly be broken by a peal of laughter, or a babel of merry voices, or by the swift soft rush of many bare feet in the deep sandy road. Looking round, you saw a bevy of gayly dressed negro women, each with a table, or a box, or a basket, or a chair cleverly poised on her head. They were bound for the far-away Flats. And bound for the Flats, too, was many an ill-favored band of a far less promising kind.

But on the evening of the wedding day the aspect of all Marl Flats was unusual in this: A truck was drawn up close to the steam washer, near the tiny wharf. As a small round table and a couple of chairs were placed in the truck, it was clearly intended either for a platform or a pulpit, or, it might be, for both. About this, indeed, there could be very little doubt, for on the table there was spread a clean white cloth, and a large blue jug, brimful of water fresh from the Yellow River, was placed exactly in the middle. Mo' Smiff, who was well in the rear of the crowd that surrounded the truck, said it looked like a christening; but a ponderous old lady dropped her elbow into his waistcoat, and he fell softly backward into a pit. To enable you to ascend to the platform, some empty boxes were arranged like steps, and covered with a strip of old common carpet.

Over the front of the truck hung the Stars and Stripes, one chair being draped with the yellow quarantine flag and the other with the blue peter. These preparations were the signal for every soul on the Flats to draw near, and near every soul accordingly came, those who had Sunday clothes having put them on, and by right of apparel standing well in front.

After a little delay a solemn procession emerged from a shed near the wharf. It was headed by three gray-haired elders in stiff white waistcoats, gorgeous orange ties, tall white hats, and bright yellow gloves. A murmur, a thrill of excitement passed through the crowd, and the people fell back in awe. Next came the Rev. Abram White with Loo leaning shyly on his arm. Loo was dressed in simple white, with a bit of white lace thrown prettily over her head, and with white cotton gloves; but her

magnificent long black arms were bare. Then followed a score of the more influential members of the minister's congregation.

Two of the elders now politely invited Abram to ascend and take a seat in the truck, and then, turning to Loo, they bent themselves nearly double in one long prodigious bow, gracefully swaying their hats between their little fat legs, and dusting the crown with their own coat tails. This exciting performance being safely concluded, each of the elders gallantly offered his arm, and begged to have the very great honor of escorting the Rev. Mrs. White to a seat on the platform. In this wise, then, with one elder on her right, and one elder on her left, and another elder closely following with outstretched arms in case she should fall, did the trembling Loo make the ascent.

So far the elders had done their duty, and they felt, moreover, that

they had done it well. And so, carefully settling their tall white hats on their woolly gray heads, they prudently spread their red cotton pocket handkerchiefs on the shaky top step, and with a sigh of relief sat cautiously down. It was right that the crowd should now cheer and clap their hands; but as the crowd did no such thing, it gradually made itself clear to the elders that something was wrong. Something was due to the crowd, and whatever it was that was due, it had been unfeelingly omitted. The minister leaned forward and whispered, and then were the elders filled with horror for their forgetfulness; but they rose to their feet notwithstanding, and taking off their hats bowed to the people three times with both grace and solemnity. The crowd was charmed. Everybody was deeply impressed. The people clapped their hands and cheered to the



echo, and the few who had Sunday clothes straightened their waist-coats and adjusted their ties, and felt extremely genteel.

The meeting had been called for the purpose of presenting to the minister a slight testimonial of respect and esteem. That is the way it was put by the elders. Of all days to make a present to a minister, the congregation thought his wedding day the fittest. The part each elder was to take in the meeting had, of course, been arranged and settled in committee. No elder, for instance, was to trespass on the part allotted to another elder. No elder while in the middle of a speech was to be forcibly pulled down by the coat tails. Elders who were waiting for their turn to speak ought not to yawn unnaturally, nor cough those little impatient coughs, nor smile excusing pitying smiles while a brother was on his feet. Nor should they shuf-

flie about, or blow their noses so very often or so very loud, or struggle with their collars, or tear off their hats or jam their hats on, or turn up their eyes, or clasp and unclasp their hands, or appear in any way to appeal mutely to Heaven. It was not good form. White folks particularly avoided such doings. Let it be a regular white folks' meeting, said the committee—orderly, solemn, full of peace and good will. And the elders said it should. And had it been possible, perhaps it would.

But when the elder who sat between the other two rose slowly to his feet, and waved his hat, and made his bow, and opened his mouth to speak, it was more than negro flesh and blood could bear. The elders on each side of him rose also, and they, too, waved their hats, and made their bow, and opened their mouths to speak likewise. Happily, however, they did

not all speak at once. But they all gesticulated—and wildly—at once. First one bawled out a few words, and stopped. Then another bawled out a few words and stopped. The third did the same. Thus it came to pass that a very great deal was said in a very short time, and everything that was said was said about the minister, and every word was in his praise. It may be that each elder was consumed with a burning desire to speak kindly of somebody else ; but their running little spurtings and spoutings quenched each burning desire to the very last spark. Their minister, they said, had been their minister ever since the war. Everybody knew it. If anybody didn't, let him hold up his hand—or hers. The meeting did not make the minister, mind ; the minister made the meeting. With the money he had saved the minister bought the wood that built the chapel. And he worked night and

day, like a team of horses, to put it up. There was no minister before him; and unless another minister came to Pine Open for the same pay exactly, which was nothing, there would be no minister after him. His pay was just what folks liked to put in the plate, and most folks liked to put nothing. But then he had his position. And some people said a minister's position was an income itself. But ask Widder Wynning to take such an income in exchange for her flour and pork ! Flour and pork ! Did anyone there ever know Abram White to keep flour and pork to himself when a fatherless child or a widow had none ? Who was so ready as their minister to help an overwrought brother to clean out his pit, or push up a truck, or fill it, or lend a dollar, or catch a mule ? Who was so ready to check the bad word, or put the cork in the bottle, or kick over a still, or walk into a row ?

And that was not all, said the elders, either. What baby in Pine Open would think it was properly christened if it hadn't been christened by the Rev. Abram White? Or what man and woman would think they were properly married if he hadn't married them? Or what man, if they were dying, would they like most to have around their bedside? or to bury them if they were dead? But what was the use of so much talking, they said. Man and boy was the minister not known to them all? Was he not a gritty man, with a kind of super-human giant backbone? Like a pine of the forest, was he not straight and sound both inside and out? And like a twin pine of the forest was the wife that stood by his side. She was the beautifullest thing that ever grew in South Carolina. She was the lily of the field. And Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. And

now, continued the elders, if the assistants would just bring out the box, the presentation should be made at once and without more ado. And accordingly the box was brought.

It was arranged that this part of the ceremony should be extremely impressive, but I am afraid the effort and the excitement of the address had somewhat altered the original plan. The box ought to have been received in dignified silence by elder number one, opened with grave deliberation by elder number two, and the contents exhibited slowly and solemnly by elder number three. But no! For as soon as the box was brought within reach, the elders in a body made a dash for possession. Together they seized it, together they tore it open, together they held its contents piecemeal up to view. One pulled out a boot, looked at it narrowly, as if it had surely got there by mischance and might be

his own, and then threw it to Abram. Another did the same with its fellow, while elder number three excitedly dragged forth a tall silk hat, and gravely and leisurely tried it on his own gray head, and then handed it up with unmistakable reluctance to Loo, as though it pained him deeply to let it go. Then came a pair of white socks, then a pair of red braces, then a pair of black gloves, and then a white cravat—all of which were duly inspected and handed into the truck. But the sensation reached its height only when the elders proudly exhibited to the admiring crowd a waistcoat, a pair of trousers, and a long clerical coat—all of the fashionable cut, as the elders could prove, and all of brand-new superfine broadcloth, both inside and out.

“Dar,” shouted the delighted crowd to Abram, “now, what d’yo’ t’ink?”

Think ! Why, no. At that supreme overwhelming moment Abram could no more think than he could fly. He could do nothing but stand and stare and grin, and show his white teeth and mop his brow, and look like a big happy child overpowered with the sudden unexpected gift of a longed-for, but altogether impossible, toy.

“How yo’ know I wanted dese ?” he said at last, and holding up the clothes. “I jes’ did want ’em, an’ right bad, an’ dat’s de troof. But how d’yo’ know’d I wanted ’em, my bredder’n?” But my brethren only cheered, and laughed, and clapped their hands, and tantalizingly struck in with the ever ready chorus :

“Shoo fly ! don’ bodder me ; shoo fly ! don’  
bodder me,  
For I’ve a wife an’ a fam-e-lee.  
Shoo fly ! don’ bodder me.”

The faith of these poor people in their minister’s integrity was bound-



less. In all his dealings they knew him to be absolutely just. When first he came to work at Marl Flats the extreme gentleness of his manners puzzled every stranger sorely. Why a supple giant with such a stride and such a length of arm should be so meek and lowly, none of these strangers could at all understand. The minister must be simple. The minister must be soft. And in domineering circles the notion very shortly spread that the minister was not only very simple indeed, but also very soft indeed. And accordingly a few of these curious people walked over to Abram's pit to see. And they saw more than ever they saw in their lives, for in reply to their challenge Abram flew out of the pit, knocked the handle out of his pick, and applied it to their impudent bones with such sudden, overwhelming, vigorous good-will, that it took them a fortnight in bed to recover from the

surprise. Abram called it clearing the temple. And certainly the rufians troubled the temple no more.

"De folks has a mos' 'stronary faith in yo', Ab'm," said Loo, as they wended their way homeward, arm in arm, after the meeting.

"Dey all b'lieves in dare heart dat yo' can't nebber do no wrong. I wish de Lord 'ud make yo' tink in yo' heart, Ab'm, dat a po' gel like me 'ud nebber do no wrong."

"Dat's jes'," returned Abram, stopping and putting his arm round her waist, so as to draw her close up to his breast—"dat's jes' what de Lord hab done, honey. De debble may bring me mighty low, Loo, but de debble an' all him angels ain' ebber gwine to make me b'lieve dis little gal can do what's bad. De Lord gabe me my faith in my little gel, an' I guess he ain' gwine to take it away. De Lord ain' a child to gib a thing and take a thing, Loo."

"How long yo' tink," asked Loo, after a long pause, and still keeping her head on his breast—"how long yo' tink dese new clo's is gwine to las', yo' bad boy?" And she drummed playfully with her fingers on the box which he carried under his arm.

"Don' know," he said, squeezing her closer. "Twenty 'ear. What fo' yo' ax?"

"'Cause, don' yo' rec'lec' what de elders say 'bout takin' de clo's back if yo' ebber fall'd away? I knows dey was on'y jokin', but——" Abram's laugh made the pine woods ring, causing a deer to bound off with a crash, and a turkey in the tree-top to start and lift its head from under its wing. But somehow it was a laugh in which Loo felt she could not join.

"Did yo' see Widder Wyning, Ab'm," asked Loo, as they resumed their walk, "an' her husban'? My, how she stared all de time yo'

was offering up prayer, an' her eyes jes' kindled!"

Yes, Abram had seen. At the close of the meeting Abram rose and gave out a hymn. It was one of those well-known, touching negro melodies, and everybody, of course, joined in. After the hymn came the prayer. Abram knelt down, facing the people, and put his hands together like a little child, and looked toward heaven with closed eyes. Not having been asked to pray for anyone else or for anything in particular, he prayed for himself and his wife, especially beseeching the Almighty never to permit the shadow of Satan to fall on their faith and love. The prayer being ended, the minister opened his eyes, and they rested, for the first time since the scene in the classroom, on Widder Wyning. She was looking at Loo, and the expression in her face was ominous. Like Loo, she was

dressed in white, and also like Loo she had been married that morning. By her side stood her husband, a rough-looking, red-headed, white sailor man, with the peak of his cap over his ear, and his blue cotton trousers tucked into his salt-whitened big sea boots. They were the only people who were not on their knees. But when Widder Wyning encountered Abram's troubled, inquiring gaze, she started a little, looked black, and took her husband away. She had married for spite, people said.

The lot of Abram and Loo in their new-married life was raised far indeed above the lot of their fellows. Among the people of Pine Open the love of these two became almost a proverb, and what astonished their neighbors most of all was the indisputable fact that their love grew daily more and more. And to whatsoever they put their hands it prospered. Even marl it-

self seemed to turn to gold. The laundry had no equal; it had no second. It was a mine of wealth, the poor folks said. Above all, among their own Loo and Abram were held in honor. And how sweet is the sleep that is pillowed on ungrudging esteem! Their hearts were filled with a deep all-satisfying peace. Their souls overflowed in unspeakable thankfulness to God. Thus for one short year did they live, and love, and toil in a sweet, unbroken, heavenly calm. Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the foundations of all that joy were broken up, and the heaven of all their peace rent in twain, and with horses of fire and chariots of fire came Apollyon down on the storm.

### CHAPTER III.

ONE evening twelve months after his marriage Abram prepared to leave his work at Marl Flats earlier than usual. He had put on his shirt, buckled his belt, settled his old felt hat on his head, and was just on the point of shouldering his tools, when a digger came up behind him and touched him on the arm. Abram looked round and frowned.

“Don’t look so darn black at a po’ debble,” said the digger, his words beginning with a growl and ending with a whine. The man was a middle-aged negro, without a rag to his back except a pair of old blue cotton pants cut short at the knee.

“Look so darn black !” echoed

Abram angrily. "Well, what d'yo' expec' wid de life yo' lead? No, I ain' gwine fill yo' truck, ef that's what yo's loafin' roun' fo'."

"I ain' loaf. I'se got a bad han'—jes' look, Marse White, what a debble ob a han'."

"Now, don' yo' call me Marse White no mo'. I ain' like it. No, I ain' gwine to fill yo' truck. I mus' get 'way home. My po' gel ain' well. We's 'spectin' a——" Abram did not say what they were expecting, but the other man was quick enough to notice that the expectation had changed Abram's rough frown into a very bright smile.

"An' all on us is 'bout dyin' to wish yo' joy, Mr. White," returned the other briskly. "But dar ain' no hurry," he persisted. "My ole woman's jes' a been roun' to dat mighty pretty place o' your'n, an' she say Mis' White say she was all right. So come 'long, Ab'm. Jes'



look at my han'! An' de child'n ain' got no braid to eat, an' te-mo's de pay."

Now Abram, as we have seen, was anxious to be off; nevertheless he pulled off his coat and shirt, and proceeded to fill the man's truck, pausing not for a moment until the work was done. Then once more he threw on his things, shouldered his tools, and strode off home. He was greatly excited. Never in all his life had he been so greatly excited. Never before had he walked so fast. So excited was he, indeed, that at every bend of the woodland track he almost expected that someone would start out of the pines and yell, "It's a boy, it's a boy, it's a boy!" Not for a moment did he reflect that it was possible someone might have yelled, "It's a girl, it's a girl, it's a girl!" Clearly what Abram desired in his heart was a boy; thought of a girl never entered his mind. Yet once—just as he

came within sight of Loo's pretty green and white cottage under the tree—another thought entered his mind that, for a moment, pulled him up sharp. Nobody had been sent hot foot to meet him. Nobody had been sent with the news. Then something was wrong. Was his boy dead? The boy that was just born—was he dead? Had God merely sent him into the world to dissolve in vapor like a falling star? The thought stunned him. And then there flashed down into his soul a thought that filled him with horror. Was his wife dead also? When he thought of his boy, Abram groaned inwardly, believing for a moment that the Almighty had done his worst. But when he thought of his wife, he saw for the first time in his life that the Almighty never does his worst. Recovering a little, he tried to laugh at himself for giving way to his feelings. He had no boy at all—at least, not yet. And Loo

was going on as well as could be expected. Of course—to be sure. But you perceive he was laboring under very great excitement. Moreover, we also know that he was a man of very deep religious feelings, and not likely to forget the revelation, that to him, poor man, had only just that very moment been revealed—the revelation that though sometimes God smites heavily, his heaviest blows never fall.

But Abram's excitement was not lessened by the sounds which he now heard issuing from the cottage. At any other time he would have known at once that these sounds were neither more nor less than shrieks of laughter and the sobs and gasps and sighs of people who had laughed until they could really laugh no longer. But now the sounds seemed to Abram like the wailing and moaning of unutterable woe. He was determined now to bottom his misery, so he flung down

his tools and strode up to the door. The rattle of the falling tools was heard, the door opened, and Loo with a happy smile and a little cry of joy stepped down off the step and laid her hands on his shoulders. Without a word, without a look, Abram turned from her and walked slowly back toward his tools, and sitting down on an old moss-covered log he buried his face in his hands. Loo knelt down beside him, and drew his head close in to her bosom.

“What’s de matter, Abe?” she asked tenderly; “ain’ yo’ well?”

“’Tain’ dat,” he returned huskily. “I’s been boddered tinkin’ ’bout yo’. Sometin’ told me yo’ was boaf daid—an’ when I see yo’ open de door——”

And although she was black, Loo understood perfectly. To comfort her husband was at that moment the greatest comfort that she herself could have had. And long did she kneel beside him, pressing his

head ever closer to her gently rising and falling bosom, whispering to him, and with her small hot hand softly stroking his coarse and scanty hair. To one person at least that hand was the most beautiful lily-white hand in the world. And to another that coarse and scanty hair flowed down in knightly wealth of rippling, flossy gold.

The sounds which Abram heard coming from the cottage were explained quite easily. Half a dozen sympathizing matrons were inside. These good colored women had come to condole with Abram's wife. They believed they had a mission at certain seasons to condole with every man's wife. Anyhow, at certain seasons it was their custom to take entire possession of every man's house. They came to relate their experiences, and some of their experiences were truly terrific. And they gloated over them. Moreover, they related their hor-

rible stories with such awful dramatic emphasis of uplifted hand and rolling eye that many a poor trembling creature who listened to them must have almost died of fright. But Loo laughed. Loo laughed and screamed until the sympathizing matrons fairly gave it up, and then they all laughed and screamed together.

But even while they were all shrieking with laughter Loo was busy about her husband's supper. And this to the lookers-on was a matter of real wonder. To have seen such elaborate preparations for one man's meal at even an ordinary time would have been something even then totally new ; but to see such elaborate preparations when a poor woman ought rightly to have been in her bed was enough to take one's breath away. The smell of the chickens roasting in front of the fire made the matrons feel desperate. Ah, and there was

cold pork, too, and hot cake, and heaps of hominy, and in the ashes under the grate a whole pile of sweet potatoes. And to the wondering matrons the smell of the coffee was as the smell of the incense is to the gods.

And when Abram came in from his ablutions, looking all fresh and new in his clean white shirt, the matrons rose, and said with a sigh that they guessed they would go. But Abram, following their eyes to the fire, guessed they should do no such thing. And, although they exclaimed and protested in chorus that their husbands were waiting and that their babies would be dying of hunger, and that there were the hens to feed, and the wood to chop, and the baking to do, and the washing to fix, and clothes to mend, and the children to put to bed, they stayed to supper notwithstanding. And the supper was delightful, they said. It was a supper to be remem-

bered forever. Ah, good gracious, what chicken ! Good gracious, what hominy and molasses and pork ! What pie, what coffee, what cake ! What crackers and butter and eggs and jam ! And, oh, dear, what fun, what wild, uproarious, harmless fun ! What shrieks of laughter, what a tossing of black arms in the lamplight, what a thumping of black hands on the snow-white cloth, what a shaking of fat sides, what a gleaming of white teeth, what a rolling of wet eyes—oh, dear, what fun, what life, what joy !

Yet, in spite of all the good things to eat, and all the good things to hear, and all the good things to tell, of all the little touches of affection that played tenderly between Abram and Loo, the jolly matrons took a kindly, silent note. Loo never sat down. All the evening she seemed actually to hover above her husband's chair, now behind it, now at this side, now at



that. They saw how she rested against his shoulder, how affectionately she stroked his great, muscular black arm, extended on the snowy cloth; they saw how fondly she toyed with his hair, nibbling at it with her ivory teeth; they saw how her very breath mingled with the curls that she smoothed back from his wrinkled brow; and they saw how eye replied unto eye and touch unto touch. But the jolly matrons did not see quite all, nor did they understand quite all that they saw. But they understood quite enough to feel sure that such affection between married people of color had never existed before. At last "Good-night" was said, and, pondering many things in their minds, the sympathizing matrons walked thoughtfully home. When next these worthy people passed Abram's cottage it was with hasty steps, lips tightly drawn, and faces sternly averted from his door.

Early next morning Abram was informed by the aged colored midwife that nothing of importance could possibly happen till evening. She was a woman of large experience, she said—vast experience, as all Carolina knew. Therefore nothing of importance would happen till evening. She, at all events, had never neglected her duty, and never—no, not for a moment—had anyone ever accused her of betraying her trust. Wherever she went she stayed. Gossip she hated, and anything to drink. No, she never crossed the doorstep until her lady was better, and she crossed it for good. It might be weak in a nurse, but she was even fonder of babies to-day than when she had babes of her own. Her mothers had always done well, and her babies were all alive that moment. If the minister doubted her word, he had merely to step round and inquire. Therefore, as nothing of importance

could possibly happen till evening, she would just walk round to her daughter's to see how the twins were progressing, and she would certainly be back in a couple of hours. And with the trust of young savages, Abram and Loo meekly accepted all that she said, and away the fearfully and wonderfully experienced old lady went.

At every fortnightly pay it was Abram's custom to put on his clerical clothes and saunter up and down Marl Flats all day long, laughing and chatting with the people. In all probability it never occurred to a single soul that the dressed-up laboring-man minister was a great moral force and preserver of order and decency. Yet he was, notwithstanding. Accordingly, after the midwife had taken herself off, Abram took out his clothes and spread them carefully on the bed, for again the fortnightly pay had come round. Shaving himself with

great deliberation, and carefully holding his own nose throughout the whole operation, as all negroes do, he kept a watchful eye all the time on his wife, whose sad, troubled face he could see plainly in the glass. All at once there was a cry. Abram started, cut himself, of course, turned, and, razor in hand, rushed forward to Loo. He got his orders in a breath. Looking wildly round the room, he made a grab at his tall silk hat, and, jamming it recklessly on his head, he took a tremendous, unpremeditated flying leap out of the door, and with the wet white lather on his frightened black face, a stiff white shirt on his back, the precious Sunday trousers on his legs, nothing on his big, flat feet, his red braces flying and whipping behind, away he tore like a whirlwind, through the pines, to fetch back the wicked old nurse.

To stop at anybody's cabin,

Abram knew, would be useless. Not only every man and every woman, but every grown up child, he felt sure, had long gone down to the Flats. So wild were the people to get there that they would hardly wait for the break of day. But Abram was wrong. One woman there was, at least, who had not gone down to the Flats—a slight little woman, a woman who wore white muslin frocks and bright pink bows and kept a little store. Widder Wyning had not gone down to the Flats.

When Abram tore past this little woman's house she was lying in bed with her face close to the window. She knew Abram, and she knew what was the matter. She had seen the old nurse go by, too, and she quite understood what was likely to happen. No woman who ever recovered, ever looked more like a woman at the point of death than did Widder Wyning at the moment

before her eyes rested on Abram. And no woman, the moment Abram disappeared, ever looked so full of fierce, determined, passionate life. Her bed was on the ground floor, the shabby little muslin blind in the window was drawn to one side, and her drawn and ghastly yellow face was pressed close to the steamy pane, and Abram could hardly have helped seeing it had he glanced that way. But it was otherwise decreed and Abram sped on.

It is recorded in Holy Writ, that no one, not wholly lost, can look with a steady eye upon a human face as it stoops in the actual commission of some great crime. Certainly very few people would have cared to look long at the awful expression on that face at the window. Slowly and silently, as the serpent uncoils, Widder Wyning raised herself on her elbow and paused. She paused, and straining to catch the faintest sound she listened long.

The morning air stirred lightly in the tops of the pines, and there was a secret, low whispering together of leaves, but that was all. There was no other sound, not even a bird, not even the snap of a twig. It was the stillness, deep and unbroken, of the forest.

Presently, and still slowly, still silently, like the serpent as before, Widder Wyning moved again—she glided off the bed and stood trembling like an aspen on the floor. The trembling increased and she shook violently from head to foot. Whatever it was that she had in her mind to do it looked like being instantly defeated. And the woman knew it, too—she saw it, felt it. But turning savagely upon her weaker self, she brought her strong white teeth together with a snap, and clenching her yellow hands like a vise, and stiffening her yellow arms into iron, and crushing her very eyes in their sockets, she held

her breath until the shaking was forced down and completely subdued. Then, as cautiously as if she were stealing it, she drew toward her off the bed an old black wrapper and put it on, and taking up an old black shawl in the same stealthy way she put it over her head. Turning to the bed, and in the very act of throwing back the clothes, she paused, she seemed to hesitate. Something lying near the pillow moved her strangely, though the devilish purpose of her face never changed. But the hesitation was the hesitation of a moment only. Stooping over the bed she gathered up the thing that had moved her, rolled it hurriedly in her shawl, and pressed it to her bosom.

Pausing at each step, and scarcely drawing her breath, she crept on tiptoe to the door, and there, with her hand on the latch, she stood listening, straining as before to catch the faintest sound. But as



before, not a sound was to be heard save the lightly stirring air in the tops of the pines, and the secret low whispering together of leaves. Slowly and little by little she raised the latch, slowly and little by little she opened the door, and then with one bold step she crossed the threshold, and stood in the dazzling light outside.

Here again she paused and listened, looking about her with a careless, usual, unconcerned air. A branch snapped. Widder Wyning started and put her foot back on the edge of the step to return. But she hesitated a moment, and then the foot was slowly withdrawn and she began to walk leisurely backward and forward in front of her house, now softly humming a tune and now softly cooing to the motionless thing at her breast. Yet she was straining her hearing to the utmost all the while. But no more branches snapped, and the branch that did

snap, snapped, she probably thought, if she could think it all, of its own accord. So with one last swift glance, this way and that, along the deserted, shady road, she crossed over to the other side, and with long quick strides, and tightened lips, she plunged into the sheltering, cool, moist wood. Once only did this poor, unhappy soul look back. Her door was open. It was open wide. And even as she looked it seemed to open wider, wider still. "Come back!" it seemed to cry, "come back, come in!" But with an angry snap at her weaker self she jerked away her eyes and pressed swiftly, darkly on.

Slackening her pace as she drew near to the end of the winding path that cut off the corner of the wood, Widder Wyning began again to listen and to look searchingly ahead and all around. And when she came in sight of Abram's pretty green-and-white cottage, all cool

and peaceful in the shadow of an overhanging tree, she stopped abruptly and stepped behind a pine. For a time—a very short time—it appeared to Widder Wyning that she saw nothing but the bright brass knocker on Abram's half open green door. The brass knocker seemed, somehow, to become red-hot, and to grow to an extraordinary size, and to come out toward her, and arrest her, and hold her under a spell. It burned her, she thought, and she pressed her hand upon her eyes, and for a moment turned away her head. "Keep back!" it seemed to cry. "For the love of pity keep back, and go away! For the love of the voiceless, withered, cold child in those arms go away! for the love of Christ, while there is time, go away!"

But no. Stepping from behind the tree, and snapping angrily at her weaker self as before, she

walked leisurely out of the wood, and with a jaunty air, and lips parted in a pleasant smile, she crossed the road and knocked lightly with her knuckles at Abram's cottage door.' There was no response. She listened. There was not a sound. She knocked again, she knocked louder. There was no response. She waited, covering her face with her shawl. Then, gliding like the shadow on the wall, or like the shadow of the Thing itself, she passed within.

She passed within—into the living room. Straight before her was the bedroom door. It stood ajar. She touched it lightly with her foot, and swinging very slowly open it revealed as slowly the head of a bed along the wall, and then the face of a beautiful, unconscious negro woman pressing deep into the snowy pillow, and then a long, black, noble arm extended on the counterpane. Again Widder Wyn-

ing trembled, but again came her teeth together like a spring, and again was her weaker self controlled by a single effort of her will. Advancing to the bedside, she stooped, and putting her ear close to Loo's mouth she listened. Loo was not dead then : Loo breathed. And now for the first time was heard a thin, tremulous little cry, a pitiful, half stifled, tiny wail. The cry spurred her to instant action. Unrolling the poor mute thing at her breast she thrust it hurriedly into the bed, and snatching up Loo's wailing infant huddled it up in her shawl. Then casting a fiendish look of triumph and hate at Loo, and a look of terror at the open door, she turned and fled. She believed that her own poor child was dead.

As fast as her feet could carry her Widder Wyning fled back home. In her going and coming she had seen not a single soul. By not a

single soul had she herself been seen. So watchful had she been that of this there was not room for the slightest shadow of doubt. To suppose that she had been observed would be absurd, incredible, utterly beyond belief. Anyhow, this was the sop that the poor wild-eyed creature threw to her conscience as she flew back into her house and closed the door. Nor was the door closed a second too soon. Someone was coming. Voices were heard in the distance. Widder Wyning put up her hand and bolted the door. The voices grew louder. The people, whoever they might be, were hurrying along in great haste. Their talk, she could hear, was all broken, jerky, spasmodic, full of gaps. Widder Wyning was horrified. These people might want to come in. The thought was maddening, and although the door was bolted tight, she brought all her strength to bear upon it,

bearing against it with her shoulder, with her head even, clenching her teeth, and bracing her feet with rigid, resolute determination against the floor. If at this moment she had looked behind her she would most surely have dropped with fright, for glaring at her, across the top of an open sugar cask in the store, were a pair of widely-dilated human eyes, as full of terror as her own. But no! and the travelers came on. Widder Wyning knew the voices. She understood every broken sentence, every half-uttered word. Nothing escaped her. She listened to every sound, to the gasping of the feeble old nurse, to the hard irregular breathing of Abram, to the dull quick swish of their feet in the deep sandy road. And to the beating of her own wildly-plunging heart she listened too. What beats! what throbs! how loud! Would Abram hear that heart, would Abram stop, would

Abram smash down the door, and with his terrible eye would he strike her dead? No, Abram passed by, passed on. The swish in the sandy road grew duller at every stride, the labored breathing ceased to be heard, and the broken voices gradually died away. But Widder Wyning still kept her weight against the door—for many a long minute, even after all was still, she kept her weight against the door. And even after she raised herself up from the door, she continued to stand for many a long minute like one in a dream. Suddenly she turned to the door again and fixed her eyes curiously on a point near the top. Widder Wyning imagined she saw there Loo's bright brass knocker. She put up her hand and tried to take it between her finger and thumb. But there was nothing to lift. She turned away her head, and notwithstanding that she shivered from head to foot, the



perspiration ran down her brow like rain. Taking two steps back she turned her head and fixed her eyes on the door again. Then came upon her a darkness as of blackest night, and rushings and thunderings in her ears, and a sickening heaving and sinking of the whole world under her feet. Once more summoning to her aid her unbending marvelous will, she walked over to the bed, laid the baby upon it, and then sank down in an unconscious heap upon the floor.

The swoon into which Widder Wyning fell did not last long. The infant on the bed was wailing piteously, and the crying may, in a measure, have helped her to recover. The look in her eyes, when she rose with a painful struggle to her feet, was bewildered, dazed. Yet she lifted the baby up in her arms, and rocked it and soothed it in her bosom as mechanically and as tenderly as though she had been

accustomed to soothe and rock little babies in her bosom all the days of her life. But suddenly she realized that the child was not her child, that it was black and not white, alive and not dead ; and she turned round to the bed and roughly threw the wailing little morsel down. But the wailing little morsel had a will of its own, just as Widder Wyning herself had, and it wailed louder and louder, until she was compelled to take it once more and hush it to rest in her bosom.

Widder Wyning sat on the edge of the bed trying to think. But as she stared point-blank at her own shop door without in the least appearing to realize that it stood quite wide open, it is plain that her efforts to think were not particularly successful. From the open door, her eyes wandered aimlessly to the shelves behind the little unpainted whitewood

counter—to those shelves which held her very small store of groceries in canisters, old biscuit tins, bottles with faded labels, and tiny boxes with faded numbers. And quite as aimlessly, her eyes wandered away from the shelves to the casks and bags against the wall, and to the odds and ends in the dingy shop window, and to the rusty iron scales at the end of the counter, and finally they rested on the counter itself. This counter was Widder Wyning's pride. With sand and stone she scrubbed it every day. Customers were severely told to keep their dirty hands off it. It was as clean as a newly-planed board. But now it was defiled. There was a great black patch upon it, and Widder Wyning walked angrily across the room to see what the great black patch was. She looked at it, she looked at it long, she went behind the counter to look at it. It was

a distinct sharply-defined impression of a very large, very wet, and very dirty hand. It was the devil ! Unquestionably—the devil ! Widdler Wyning slowly turned her dilating eyes to the door. Was the door open, was it really open, or did she only dream ? She went to it, she went to the door, she shook it with her hand. Yes, it was open ; it was open wide. She shut it. Averting her face, she put up her hand and touched the bolt with her fingers. She shuddered. It was dirty and wet, like the hand on the counter. “Yes,” she muttered, “it was the devil.” And with eyes full of horror she stretched out her stiffening arm and pointed in agony at the mysterious hand—it was the devil, the devil was in the house, he was there—there ! Her teeth fairly rattled again. She thrust her fingers into her mouth to steady her jaws. But instantly remembering that her fingers had

touched the bolt, she snatched them away, and shrieked aloud. Rushing forward to the bacon stand she seized a long, sharp knife, and with shriek upon shriek threw up her arm to take her life. Suddenly the door opened. A shadow, as of herself, passed swiftly in, passed swiftly up to the demented woman, seized her uplifted hand, and coiled a thin, black, wiry arm about her neck. It was Widder Wyning's mother. Without a word, without a sound, she wrenched the knife from the desperate fingers, and threw it on the floor. Then—and hardly seeming even to breathe—the thin old creature pushed her daughter before her, pushed her toward the bed, pushed her into it. Then she saw the baby.

“Good Gord!” she moaned. “Good Gord A’mighty, if de child ain’ black!” and striking her thin old hands together her tears fell

like rain. Widder Wyning turned away her head and closed her burning eyes.

“De chile—whose is it, honey?” the old woman asked, bending over and laying her cool thin hand on her daughter’s throbbing brow. “Tell yo’ ole mudder, honey, do.”

“Mine,” she whispered back, her yellow eyelids trembling. “Mine, mine!” and a strangely mocking smile played round her parched and twitching mouth. Another awful thought was shaping in her mind.

“Dat I knows, honey—dat I knows, po’ gel. But whose—but whose?” and the poor old soul went down upon her knees and fondly stroked her face and hair.

“De minister’s — Abram’s — Abram White’s.”

“What!” cried her aged mother, struggling to her feet. “Den may Gord A’mighty hab messy ’pon yo’ po’ immo’tal soul!”

## CHAPTER IV.

WIDDER WYNING made no mistake about the folks who passed her door. It was Abram beyond a doubt returning with the nurse. That experienced, aged lady had been indulging in romance. Relatives at Pine Open, Abram found, she had none. Her daughter was a myth. The twins were a myth. And Abram began to feel afraid that even her experience was a myth. So nimbly had she trotted along, that when Abram overtook her she was more than half-way to the Flats, and when he tried to remonstrate, she met him with noisy defiance, and gave him to understand that she was born in Charleston, and not yesterday either, and that she was deter-

mined to have a day at the fair. But it was neither the time nor the neighborhood for such eccentric airs, so the wrathful minister, without more ado, tucked the old midwife under his arm and began to run home, but he had not run many yards before her screaming and kicking subsided, and she promised to walk quietly the rest of the way and take care of her charge. But she had her revenge, she believed, for when they got back to the cottage she flatly refused to let Abram put his foot inside the door. It was usual, she said, on particular occasions like these for men folks to remain outside. A minister, indeed, and not to know! If he wanted to do something useful there was wood to chop, she supposed, and water to draw. Or, stop: he might just poke around and try to find a respectable woman—or even a respectable girl would do—and send her in to do the



work. As for herself she was a nurse—she wasn't exactly a slave.

But Abram insisted on knowing how it fared with his wife. He longed, indeed, to go in, but as custom appeared to be dead against him in that respect, he had to submit and remain outside. However, as he appeared to be so determined, and as it was not unlikely that he might put her under his arm again if she went too far, she promised to let him know how his wife was progressing. Accordingly in she went and back she came immediately, nodding her little old head, and mumbling with her mouth full of pins, and arraying herself in one of Loo's big white aprons. His wife was as well as could be expected, she said; his wife sent him her love, and said he was to be patient, and do as he was told by the nurse, and be a good boy. And thus Abram was made almost happy, and although he was convinced

there was neither a woman nor a girl left in the village, he set off on his quest with an easier mind.

But the old lady had told Abram a lie. However, what was a lie? It was merely part of her professional equipment, which she kept ready for use by her side with her scissors and thread. Loo was not doing as well as could be expected. As Loo was when Widder Wyning left her, so was Loo now. She was unconscious. She had not moved, no, not by the breadth of the finest hair. And two or three minutes actually elapsed before it began to dawn on the old woman's mind that something had already happened, and that something was provokingly irregular, and possibly rather seriously wrong. Then she became a little alarmed, and putting on her large brass-rimmed spectacles she bestirred herself. Her great reputation was at stake. Groping about in a half-blind way she at last laid

hands on the baby. It appeared to be dead, yet on due examination it appeared to be warm enough to be all alive and screaming. The puzzled old body took it to the window to obtain a closer look.

“Good Gord!” she exclaimed, and in her astonishment she nearly let the baby fall; “Good Gord, it’s white!”

Then she chuckled, then she laughed out loud, laughed out again and again. But it was a loud laugh, and Loo, if she was not quite dead, might have heard, so the merry old nurse looked round to see. And in turning to see, she knocked the tiny infant’s unoffending little head against a flower-pot in the window. The flower-pot fell with a crash, the baby drew its breath and screamed, and Loo slowly opened her eyes.

When the Rev. Abram White returned from the search, which he knew before he started would be

fruitless, the nurse informed him that his first-born child was a little girl. He should see it by-and-by. The mother herself had not seen it yet, therefore he must be patient and not complain. That this poor old negro midwife had some kind of a conscience is plain, for she had an almost irresistible burning desire to tell Loo at once the terrible news. To be in possession of a secret at once so astounding, so delicious, so rare, and at the same time to keep perfectly silent and perfectly still, was the greatest trial in life. Twice did she bend over Loo and open her withered lips to speak, and twice did her conscience draw her back. And when the same burning desire impelled her to speak to the husband, that gallant old threadbare conscience interposed again.

Yet, nevertheless, thank God, as she put it, if she could not speak she could think. And while attending with unusual quietness and care

to her professional duties she thought a very great deal. Never in all her life before had her mind been half so full or half so active. It kept her rheumatic old bones perpetually on the move. But, most wonderful of all, she took hardly any interest in Loo's personal belongings. It is true that she rummaged in every box, every basket, every cupboard, every drawer, and also that she untied every bundle and unpinned every packet, and lifted up every lid. But that was mere professional force of habit. Interest in what she now did she had none. Her interest was dead. It was mere mechanical rummaging. Her mind was elsewhere. Her mind hovered incessantly over the bed. Every half minute the busy old woman paused in her work, and shot a swift, searching glance over her spectacles at the tranquil black face lying deep in the snow-white pillow. "Oh,

what a fall ! ” she kept mumbling, “ Oh, what a fall ! what a terrible, terrible fall ! ” She never ceased. She mumbled the same words over all day long. Oh, what a fall, what a fall ! Never again would Loo Adams hold up that head—and what a proud, bold head it was ! Her husband was dishonored. She had tarnished his fair fame. He would turn her out. Together with her hideous crime he would cast her forth into the street, and slam the door, and turn his back upon her forever. Pine Open would consume her with fire of scorn. The meeting would expel her with fasting and prayer. The sanctuary had been defiled, and it must be purified and consecrated afresh. If she approached a cabin, the people within would arise in their wrath and shut the door. If she knocked, no one would open. If she spoke, no one would reply. If she asked for bread, they would most surely

give her a stone ; and if she asked for water to drink, they would most surely give her gall. Her occupation was gone. No one would give her work. She would come to want. She would be without a shelter by day, and at night she would have nowhere to lay her head. She would beg. She would starve. She would steal. She would become a by-word and a mark. She would be shunned like the plague. She would dwindle away. She would die, and without one tear of pity or one word of prayer her body would be huddled at midnight into an unknown and unblessed grave.

However, the critical moment arrived at last, and all the mumbling and rummaging and prophesying in the world could no longer keep it back. Loo longed to see her baby ; she longed to look into its eyes. To touch the little thing with her lips, to feel it with her fingers, to press it close in to her

breast, was in itself so unspeakably heavenly, that the poor young mother faithfully believed that she could never again have another desire, and that her Heavenly Father himself could not possibly have anything left to give. Only she longed so much to look into the tiny darling's eyes. Therefore, draw back the curtains, and, for a moment, draw up the blind, and let the soft morning light into the darkened room. The nurse grumbles a little, but lets in the light all the same, and Loo raises herself on her elbow, and with a trembling hand lifts up the shawl that covers the small bald head, and gazes long and wonderingly into her baby's face. And the grim old negro nurse, with her hand upon the blind, gazes long and wonderingly over her brass-rimmed spectacles at the mother. Of what, now, was that lost, abandoned mother thinking? Clearly of what-



ever the lost, abandoned mother was thinking she was certainly not distressed, for she kissed the little, throbbing head most lovingly, and most lovingly did she cover it with the shawl. "Ah, no shame!" muttered the midwife to herself, letting fall the blind; "no shame, no sense, no heart, no soul!"

"It looks a'mos' like a white baby," Loo murmured. "But I 'specs de color 'll change. I've been tole dey does."

"What'll yo' husban' say?" the nurse asked, in an odd, dry way.

"Say 'bout what?" said Loo, settling her head on the pillow, and calmly closing her eyes.

"'Bout what? Why 'bout de chile, 'bout de color."

"Oh, dat ain' nuttin'," returned Loo. "Ab'm'll know de color's boun' to come all right." And straightway she fell into a deep, sweet sleep.

"Bless us an' save us!" groaned the old woman, and clasping her

hands, and turning up her eyes in horror, she sank overpowered into her chair. What an audacious, what an outrageously wicked young woman Loo Adams must be ! Why, then, it appeared that she actually meant to hoodwink her husband ! Well, hoodwink a credulous, ignorant husband she might, but she could not hoodwink Pine Open. If her husband was blind, Pine Open was not : the child's color was there, and all Pine Open could see it. Her husband was minister, look you ! And if a minister dared to shut his eyes to a crime like this, it would be worse than the crime itself. There would then be two crimes—the crime of the woman and the crime of the man ; but the minister's crime would be of the deepest dye. Out of Eden he should go, and out of Eden he should be kept by flaming swords turning every way. So thought the angry old nurse.

In an hour or thereabouts the young mother awoke, refreshed and feeling strong. Abram was waiting at the door. She heard his voice and called him in. That it was, in spite of their lowliness, and color, and endless physical disabilities, a joyful meeting none who knows them will doubt, and in the very short time during which talking could be allowed, a world of tender things were said. The tendency of these little endearments was to heighten the old midwife's disgust ; but she would be amply repaid, she thought, for everything, as soon as the minister saw his baby. And it would only be right that he should see it in as good a light as possible ; so she walked to the window and considerably drew up the blind.

"Baby ain' got its color yet, Ab'm," said Loo, uncovering the child's face, "it's a'mos' white."

"I don't care if it's blue, honey, so long's it's dar an' yo's dar," and,

by the way he touched the little stranger, and bent over it, and looked at it, and held its beautiful little hand between his finger and thumb, it is highly probable that he would not have cared a button even had it been really ultramarine. The color was nothing, he said. In a very few days the color would come all right. In Barbary, for instance, was not every child white at its birth? To be sure it was, and in time it changed to its natural color, as everyone knew. But it was clear that not everyone believed, for with an angry snort the old nurse flung out of doors exclaiming :

“But dis ain’ Barbary, yo’ stupid blind man, dis ain’ Barbary !” But as neither Abram nor Loo heard very distinctly what she said they were in no way troubled, and the nurse remained undisturbed, choking with vexation, outside. And so with a thankful heart Abram

very soon after went out himself, finishing his toilet in the outhouse, and preparing, as his custom was every pay day, to walk down to the Flats. He believed that he would be the bearer of his own good news. For at the very moment of his child's birth was not Pine Open, to his certain knowledge, utterly deserted? Yet the story of the white baby was known at the Marl Flats notwithstanding. It was in every mouth. Before sundown it would be in every mouth in Charleston. Before a week it would be in every mouth in South Carolina.

Now, at all such times it was usual for young married people to receive the hearty congratulations of the entire community, and therefore as Abram walked up to the fringe of the crowd on the Flats he began to feel somewhat shy, for he knew that the moment he announced the astounding news that he was a father, the multitude

would throng about him to shake him by the hand. No doubt such receptions were, for the most part, particularly pleasant to the negro mind,—sometimes, indeed, they were particularly delightful,—but they were also sometimes not a little embarrassing. And Abram felt not a little embarrassed when the three elders in their gorgeous Sunday clothes came forward with outstretched hands to greet him. He smiled and opened his mouth to speak, but something in the expression of their faces made him pause.

“We’s deeply grieved to heah ob yo’ ’fliction, sah.” They all spoke together, as if they had been drilled. They meant to be very impressive, and accordingly their speech was solemn and slow. And solemn and slow was their way of shaking his hand. Then, with rather an angry glance at Abram’s smiling face, they turned and walked away without another word.

Abram was dumfounded. But recovering himself at once, he strode after them, calling out :

“Hi ! But I’s gwine tell yo’ ’bout de baby.” The elders stopped and turned.

“We’s deeply grieved to heah ob yo’ ’fliction, sah,” they said again in chorus.

“But de Lord——”

“It ain’ de Lord, young man,” growled the shortest of the three ; “it’s de debble.” And swelling in their white waistcoats, and spreading out their fingers in their well-kept yellow gloves, these Spartan fathers strutted pompously away. Abram was cut to the quick. With an angry light in his eye he turned and appealed to the crowd. If the lookers-on had any idea what it meant, would someone kindly step to the front and explain ? But the lookers-on turned away their faces, looking at one another uneasily, and, slowly dividing, they split up

into little knots, and presently began to melt away. Abram stood stock still, staring dumbly at all that went on. It was like a dream. The power to think was quite suspended. Was it true—was there after all something in the world even still more awful than the lash? And was that awful something this? Pulling himself together Abram walked quickly up to an aged, white-headed negro who was hobbling painfully along after the rest. Laying his hand on the old man's naked, skeleton shoulder, he asked hoarsely, in a voice all changed :

“What does it mean, ole man? Tell me, ole man, what all dis means?”

“It means dat we's deeply grieved to heah ob yo' 'fliction, sah,” and in the old man's nearly sightless eyes there was grief unmistakable. And could Abram but have seen it there was grief unmistakable everywhere.



“Well, but I ain’ got no ’flection, don’ yo’ see?” said Abram vehemently. “I’s on’y got a po’, tiny, little chile. A chile ain’ no ’flection. An’ what fo’ does dey talk ’bout ’flection fo’?”

“Well, den,” said the old man timidly, “s’pose a white man hab a black baby ; what was yo’ call dat—’flection?” Abram nodded gloomily and folded his arms.

“So ! But if a colored man hab a white baby it ain’—it ain’ ’flection ?”

“No,” returned Abram, with decision, “it ain’. Ce’t’ny it ain’ no ’flection to me, ’cause, don’ yo’ see, ole man? my chile’ll turn to its nat’shal color by’m-by.”

“An ’oon de white man’s chile—de black chile—turn to ’um nat’shal color, too ?” Abram looked straight before him and made no reply.

“I ain’ like to hurt yo’ feelin’s, sah,” said the old man, after a pause, “but de folks is jes’ ’bout wild.

Dey says it's brought disgrace on all Pine Open. Dey 'spec's you'll do what's right. Dey 'spec's you'll do it like a minister 'n' a man. I heah one man say if yo' chile was his'n he'd kill it fust, an' den kill de——"

"What!" thundered Abram, seeming instantly in his wrath to rise and expand into proportions truly gigantic. "What!" And striding up to the crowd he demanded, in a voice that made many of them quail, the man who had dared to utter aloud such murderous thoughts about his wife and child. With something like instinct the crowd shrank away to the right and left, fixing an incriminating look upon the ill-favored giant whose truck Abram had filled only the evening before. Whirling on high a spade, the giant swore he would cleave Abram in twain if he advanced another step. But Abram's huge fist shot out like a thunderbolt, and the giant was

knocked off his legs and rolled over on the ground like a log, where for a time he lay very still. Here and there there was applause and other signs of approval, for the giant was an unpopular ruffian, and the people were pleased to see him so easily laid low. But the applause was followed at once by a growl of remonstrance.

"A Gospel minister striking a po' man daid !" cried some. "Fo' shame !"

"Yah ! An' while he got on de minister's clo's," cried others. "Fo' shame !"

"Yah ! He ain' no minister what strikes," cried all. "Fo' shame !"

"What ?" thundered Abram, silencing the crowd with the lightning of his eye. "Den what yo' cheer fo' ? Does yo' tink I'se on'y a minister an' not a man ? Lem me tell yo' de Lord made me a man at de fust, an' he 'spec's ebbery minister to be a man to de las', an'

dat's jes' what Ab'm White's gwine to be. Do yo' hear'n me? De Lord don' want a minister what ain' a man. I ain' no kid glove minister, no mo'n yo's kid glove folks. An' strike? Moses was a minister, and Moses struck; Samiwell was a minister, an' didn't he strike; Elijah was a minister, and didn't Elijah strike; Peter was a minister, and didn't Peter strike; de Lord hisself was a minister, an' didn't de Lord strike? Yes, out an' out, tip-top ministers all o' dem, what cared no mo' fo' de debble den I does fo' yo'." Talk like this went home. The people were struck, and, with the exception of three or four noisy fellows at the back, who no doubt desired to pay off an old score, everybody was silent.

"Yah! but yo' ain' Moses!" these men shouted. "No, nor yo' ain' Samiwell! An' yo' ain' Elijah! No, an' yo' ain' de Lord hisself!"

"No!" roared Abram, shaking

his fist at them ; “but by de Lord A’mighty, I’s e Ab’m, an’ if any man ’sults my wife an’ chile I’ll make dat man’s bones like de sands o’ de seashore fo’ multitude!”

Now to the folks of the Flats and Pine Open this was a dark saying, and they pondered it in their minds. Nor is it surprising they should ponder it in their minds, for dark sayings are not infrequently pondered even in places where the light is clear and strong, while, with the exception of a faint, faraway, prison-house glimmer, or occasionally a cold, intermittent, prison-yard gleam, at the Flats there was no light at all.

Doubtless Abram, as a messenger of the Gospel, had but little to tell. And if it was but little he could say, it was but little his hearers could understand. It is true that the shepherd and his flock had a little meetinghouse fold, but of any particular church they knew noth-

ing whatever, and they knew nothing whatever of any particular creed. In his discourses Abram's earnestness was electrical. There were times when it brought the whole congregation to their feet with a bound and a shout, and there were times when it sent them to their knees with a groan. When he recited any of the very few hymns he knew by heart, it was not unusual for his hearers to abandon themselves to their feelings and lose all self-control. And the difference between the shepherd and the sheep in constitutional temperament was but slight after all. He belonged to the same race. Therefore we should not be surprised to hear that occasionally Abram also abandoned himself to his feelings and lost all self-control.

After what had happened, Abram White was not the man to linger very long that day at Marl Flats. He was angry, hurt, and sad. But

in the presence of the people he held himself erect notwithstanding, looking every member of his congregation squarely in the face. And when at last he turned to leave the ground, his bearing was as calm as the unclouded sky above him, and not without a touch of simple, manly dignity.

Abram had reached the end of the long line of mean-looking stalls on the bank of the river, and was about to turn off into the road, which led by an easy ascent into the woods. It was the minister's usual way home. And here quite unexpectedly Mo' Smiff appeared. Abram paused for a moment and looked him over, for the boy seemed unusually grimy, and even more than ever lost in rags. Mo', however, only grinned.

"How yo' do, sah?" he said, with a half impudent tug at his wool. "I'se got somfin' I'se agwine tell yo'." Now, Mo' that morning

had been watching Widder Wyning's house. He expected she would go like all the others to the Flats, and he meant to steal her sweets and crackers. What it was that Widder Wyning rolled up in her shawl and took away the lynx-eyed rogue saw well enough. And well enough he saw what Widder Wyning threw down on the bed when she returned. Accordingly he was bursting, as he would himself have put it, to clear up Widder Wyning's doings and take the load off Abram's mind.

"Sumfin' to tell me," said Abram, repeating the lad's words as he took him playfully by the ear. "No, sho'ly. Yo's too much a man to talk to yo' minister now, yo' boy. Why, Mo', yo' is chewin' tobacco!" Mo' looked another way and shot out the quid.

"But what was yo' gwine tell me, Mo'?" asked Abram, about to move on.



"I'se gwine to tell yo' 'bout yo' babby," and the young rascal looked up into Abram's face and grinned. To Abram what else could this be but insult, and for a moment he writhed visibly under the infliction of the deep and unexpected stab. Then turning upon the boy he took him by the shoulders and shook him violently. Mo' opened his mouth and tried hard to bawl out some explanation, but a great uproar arose, and his voice was drowned; men shouted, and women screamed, and suddenly a band of half-naked boys bounded past with excited people in hot pursuit, and before Abram had time to interfere Mo' Smiff was torn from his grasp and flung to the ground. With the shaking he received Mo's shirt had given way, and just as the angry mob rushed up to where he stood, a quantity of crackers, sweets, and cake tobacco, which he had stowed away next to

his ebon skin, fell in a shower about his feet.

“Heah’s de t’ief,” yelled the excited people as they dragged at Mo’s old shirt and trousers; “heah’s de t’ief fo’ yo’,” and they tore out his pocket and held up a handful of small coin. A robbery, it appeared, had only just been committed. A troop of small desperadoes had made a raid on an old woman’s sweetstuff stall, and in the pursuit which instantly followed the attack, Mo’, who had had no hand in the matter, was the only person taken. But he made no defense,—perhaps silence was golden,—and the old woman who had been robbed received back her money and goods with tears of gratitude, although it is certain that she sold neither tobacco nor crackers, nor had even a single cent been stolen from her well secured pocket. And then came the constable, and Mo’ was led away; but as he turned to

leave the spot he shouted out to Abram:

“Dis am all 'long ob yo', Abe White. What fo' yo' shooked de crackers out'n my ole shirt? Yah! Now I'se gwine tell yo' nuttin'.”

In the presence of the people, it has been said, Abram carried himself erect and moved about with quiet dignity, but the moment he entered the sheltering pines on his way home his manner changed. His gait, that easy, swinging stride, slackened into an unsteady, slouching trail, and his head sank lower and lower until his chin rested on his breast. Across his path lay many a fallen pine, but instead of bounding lightly over them, as his way had ever been, he now stepped wearily upon them and wearily off them, stepping slowly and almost painfully, as an old man might do, and instead of clearing with his usual quick, elastic spring all the green and evil-smelling pools and

swampy bits of road, he trailed heavily and unconsciously through them. Nor did he even lift a finger to unhook the briars that clawed and dragged at his prized and well-kept clothes. The forest began to grow dark. Heavy black clouds sailed swiftly close to the tops of the trees and filled the sky. The silent lightning, too, began to open and shut behind the dark tree trunks in quick, spectral gleams, but of the sudden change and rapid deepening of the storm Abram took on note.

“Ah, deah Lord Gord!” he cried, abruptly coming to a stop and barring his head and looking piteously up through the trees at the threatening sky, “dar ain’ no messy fo’ a po’ black wu’m like me. No,” he continued, and for emphasis he stretched out his arm and laid his great clenched hand against the trunk of a mighty tree, “no, nut fo’ me, nut fo’ me!” While Abram

was yet speaking the gates of the storm were opened wide, and the wrath of the tempest poured down upon the earth and filled the dark hollow-sounding woods with horror. Worn and unstrung as the negro was, his mind now turned to the awful terrors of the last day, and he clung wildly to the reeling tree for support. The world seemed all ablaze. Blinding lightning was followed almost instantly by lightning equally blinding, with gaps of darkness, truly Egyptian, slipped between. The continuous crash of the thunder was hideous, and it almost unsettled Abram's reason.

That life could indeed be bitter and hard this poor colored minister knew from long and sad experience. We already know that he had been a slave. At one time he had been cursed and kicked daily. Occasionally he had been put into irons and starved. Occasionally he had been stripped, tied up, and flogged.

And occasionally when he had tried to escape he had been hunted down with dogs. But never, even to this beaten and harried slave, had life been so poisonously bitter as it was that day. That morning, because the Almighty had given him a child, he could have shouted for joy. And now he could have shouted for joy—nay, could even have wept for joy—had the Almighty been pleased to take it away. Yet he was ever mindful of all mercies, and when the brunt of the storm passed away he fell meekly upon his knees, and although the wind still raved among the pines in a deep, unbroken roar, and while the rain still lashed down upon him in a drowning, smoking flood, he still knelt on, unmindful, motionless, rapt in all-absorbing prayer. It was the hour, as he used to say in after days, wherein he first gradually began to receive his true sight.

## CHAPTER V.

**ABRAM** had certainly not been long gone from his home, yet it appeared to the old nurse as if he would never return, and her anxiety on this point, together with an unalterable belief that something terrible would happen when he did return, worked her up to a high pitch of excitement. That he would come—if he came back at all—raving like a madman, she felt convinced. He would come in with a crash and a roar, and cast his wife headlong into the gutter. The taunts, the jeers, the pity of the Flats would drive him to despair. He would become distracted. That under those taunts, those jeers, that pity, a man like the minister could hold up his head even for a moment

was incredible. He would go mad. Murder would be done. She would see it done. And perhaps there would be an inquest,—there sometimes was,—and she would be there. Her name would be in every mouth. She would become famous far and wide. But when Abram, all drenched and beaten in the swirling storm, at last softly opened the door, and walked in with an air far more gentle, and far more subdued, than ever she had known him wear before, the shock was greater than the nurse could stand. Throwing her apron over her head, and rocking herself to and fro in the rocker, her vexation vented itself in sobs and tears ; and nothing was of any avail to ease the pain which she told Abram she had in her side, but a very severe dose of something hot and sweet and strong.

But it was not until the nurse's sufferings were greatly relieved that Abram ventured to tell her that a



report was gaining ground that fever had once more made its appearance in their neighborhood. Now, it is certain that fever in one form or other hung about that neighborhood always. Yet whenever the fever broke out afresh, it was the custom of the women to pretend to give way to boundless alarm. And this the orthodox old nurse now proceeded to do by throwing up her hands and turning up her eyes. But when Abram spread out before her a brand-new five-dollar bill, and told her that the bill should be her own if she would throw out a hint that it would be better if nobody called, because if anyone did they would bring the fever, and if the fever was brought his wife would surely take it, and if she took it she would just as surely die. When he told the old nurse this, she became silent once more, and appeared to be deeply touched at Abram's pathetic way, and when

she shut up her old leather purse there seemed to be a world of decision in the sharp, significant snap. And when Abram promised her a similar bill as soon as she found that the baby showed signs of turning to its natural color, the old lady was betrayed by emotion into a sharp significant wink.

Then pulling off his sodden coat and waistcoat, and rolling up his white shirt-sleeves, according to long-established custom, he went softly back to his sleeping wife, and sitting down by the bedside he began very gently to stroke her motionless hand. But from the twitching of the muscles of his face, and the hunted, weary look in his eyes, and from the heavy drops of perspiration that rolled down his brow, it was not hard to understand what a very bitter fight was being fought in the poor man's soul. That day he had not only lifted his hand against a man, but he had also

told a deliberate lie about the fever, and had bribed and beguiled a silly old woman to begin a crooked and dangerous course of deception. He had done all this—he, the minister. And thus for nearly an hour did he sit in torment at his wife's bedside, holding her hand, and bowing his head over it, and pressing it tenderly to his lips.

At last Loo opened her eyes. For quite five minutes, and all unknown to Abram, she lay silently watching every twitch and movement in his neck and face. She seemed to be reading him through and through. Her brilliant eyes appeared to search into his very soul. The nurse had been dropping words of poison while Abram was away. Suddenly Loo withdrew her hand from his grasp and ran her fingers playfully through his thick, short hair.

“Aha!” he said gayly, “now yo’s waked up. Now yo’s jes’ like yo’-self.”

"Yes," she returned, "I feel a'mos' well again. But yo's soon back from de Flats, Abe, yo' bad boy. Has de folks hear'n 'bout me? Has de folks ax'd 'bout me, Abe—'bout me an' de—de—a—de chile? Has dey, Abe?"

"Ax 'bout'n yo', Loo?" he cried; "ax 'bout'n yo'? An' yo' ax dat!" and he threw himself back in his chair and laughed, and roared, and rocked himself to and fro and held his sides, and coughed, and choked, and stamped, and slapped his knees as if it was the very greatest joke in the whole wide world. "Why," he went on, "de folks so jes' kep' on axin' an' axin', an' crowdin' an' crowdin', an' crushin' an' crushin' to ax 'bout yo', dat de fair was jes' stuck dead still, an' dar wa'nt nobody to buy nuttin' nor nobody to sell nuttin' de hol time I was dar. So I jes' took de fust chance, Loo, my po' gel, an' bolted right away. Ax, Loo! Good Lor'!" and off he

started laughing, and choking, and stamping, and shaking again. But all the same, the Rev. Abram did not care to meet the large, velvety black eyes that were fixed upon him in such a puzzled, inquiring, yet melancholy, gaze. By and by, when Abram had sobered down, she observed that no one had called to ask how she was.

“Call! Call, yo’ say? Call heah?” he exclaimed again. “No, an’ I guess dey ain’ gwine to call. Leastwise, not wid de fever so mighty bad. De ole nurse ain’ gwine let nobody in heah, yo’ bet! S’pose yo’ took’d dat fever, what den?”

“I ain’ ’fraid o’ fever, Abe,” she replied softly. “Let de folks come, if—if de folks wants to come. But what did de folks say ’bout—’bout de chile, ’bout de chile’s——” She sighed wearily and closed her eyes, leaving her question unfinished.

“Oh! yo’ means ’bout de chile’s color,” said Abram hesitatingly.

“Well, de folks said,”—and his look grew very unsteady under her quiet, questioning gaze—“de folks said de color war jes’ all right. Dey said dat pure-bred color’d folks’ child’n was a’mos’ allus born’d dat a-ways. De chile’ll jes’ be all de same as we is in fo’ or five days, Loo ; see if ’tain’.”

“Come heah,” she said, after a pause, “come heah, Abe, an’ put yo’ face close down to mine.” And he knelt down by the bedside and put his face close to hers as she desired.

“Abe,” she whispered quaveringly, “do yo’ love me for all de world jes’ de same? I know yo’ do, ole boy, but I’s dyin’ to heah yo’ say so, Abe.”

Abram started.

“Mo’,” he whispered back, “heaps mo’, honey.”

“An’ do yo’ b’lieve in me jes de same, an’ do yo’ trus’ me jes’ de same? I know yo’ do, ole Abe, but I’s jes’ dyin’ to heah yo’ say so, po’ boy.”

"Mo', honey : heaps an' heaps mo'," and he slipped his arm under her neck and kissed her. And what else, indeed, could poor Loo do but twine her arms round her minister's neck, too, and kiss him again and again.

"An' yo' ain' never gwine to let folks' tongues come atwix' us to kill us, is yo', Abe?"

"No, Loo. May de A'mighty strike me stone daid if I do. But what yo' axin' all dis fo', Loo? It cuts me jes' like de lash."

"Well," she said, smiling up at him through the tears that were now welling into her eyes, "what yo' mammy an' daddy call yo' Ab'm fo'?"

Abram smiled.

"'Cause dey said what I was de great trial. But dey mix'd dat story de wrong way, po' tings. Mammy an' daddy meant de ole Bible Ab'm, I 'spec'. But what fo' yo' ax?"

"An' de ole Bible Ab'm ce't'n'y

did hab a mos' desp'ate great trial, I reckon, Abe," she said, turning his face round so that she might look closer into his eyes.

"Yes, a mos' desp'ate great trial ce't'n'y, Loo."

"An' he was tole jes' to wait an' wait, an' hope an' hope, an' trus' an' trus'; an' when de worst couldn't be no worser, dat ole Ab'm jes' waited and waited on. Ain' dat so?"

"Dat's so, honey; jes' waited, an' hoped, an' trusted on, wid de knife held up to kill de boy."

"Waited until de angel came, Abe?"

"Yes, until de angel came, my Loo."

"An' yo', my po' Abe—when de trial comes to yo'?"

"I'll wait, honey."

"An' when yo'r worst can't be no worser, Abe?"

"I'll wait."

"How long?"

"Till de angel comes, my Loo."



Then more words between them became impossible.

Suddenly the deep silence of that little inner chamber was broken by the shrill voice of a child calling in at the outer door:

“Widder Wyning wanks t’ know how de ba-be is !”

“G’long out’n dis !” screamed the old nurse, picking up a broom and making a dash at the door: “g’long out’n dis, wid yo’ dirty Pine Open fever ! Don’ yo’ bring no fever heah. Dis am a gen’lem’s house—a minister’s house. G’long an’ holler to yo’ ole, yaller Widder Wyning ! G’long !” And the terrified, nearly naked little black girl flew off like the wind, glancing behind her as she went, to see how or where Abram’s pleasant little cottage had so suddenly and so very strangely changed. Even so early in the very first day, you observe, had Nemesis looked in upon poor Widder Wyning. Some

women returning early from the Flats had dropped in to tell her the news. When she gathered that her child was alive, she pressed her yellow, clenched hand upon her heart, and closed her eyes. Her end, she thought, had come. Her heart felt cleft in twain.

But bedtime came, and Abram said good-night and retired to rest. That is to say, he crept into a loft over the outhouse and threw himself down among the hay and straw; but to sleep he did not try. He lay a-thinking, thinking, thinking. The measure of faith he had in his wife was well pressed down and running over, if the devil would but only leave it undisturbed. But that, alas ! is not the devil's way. Two hours before dawn Abram dropped silently out of the little loft and walked through the pitchy darkness straight into the heart of the solemn, still pines. Solemn they were, indeed, and still,

with a solemnity and stillness to be equaled only in awe by another such spot at the same dark hour. Except for the hiss now and then of a startled snake, or the sudden, unearthly cry, afar off, of some prowling beast of prey, this deep and thrilling silence remained quite unbroken. To the negro, the woods at the dead of night are full of terrors. And Abram was no exception. But on the night before us he marched straight into the heart of the pines without giving a single thought either to what might be among them, or above them, or beneath them. His heart was crying aloud for more faith. The Almighty had spoken to him in the forest storm, but that was hardly yet enough. He longed for the Almighty to speak just once again. Mark you, he did not clearly know for what he longed; nevertheless, it was for this new assurance that his whole nature now cried out. He

longed for the Almighty to speak just once again. And in his inmost soul Abram believed ever afterward that the Almighty did.

Placing his folded arms against a tree, Abram bowed his head upon them and prayed. Every physical atom of the man now entered into the strife. Every sinew stood out like a cord; every muscle hardened into iron. Thorns and sharp roots cut into his horny feet, so hard were they braced against the ground. The jagged, rough bark cut into his forehead, so hard was it braced against the tree. The snake hissed and the wild beast afar off howled, but Abram did not hear. He heard only God. The wild cat glared down upon him with dilating and contracting eyes of glowing phosphorescent fire, but Abram did not see. He saw only God. An agony was passing, he was fighting, and it was with God he believed that he now fought; and

at dawn, when the strife had quite died away, Abram believed, too, that, like Jacob in the beautiful and imperishable story of the conflict with the angel, God in his infinite mercy had given him strength to prevail. And then the sun rose and the milk-white mist began to trail away. Then also Abram turned with bowed head toward home.

Trudging slowly and heavily along, with his weary-looking eyes fixed vacantly on the wet uneven ground, he came to a breadth of bare, soft black earth, not many yards from the tree where he had fought in prayer. Here Abram suddenly came to a stand, and his knees fairly shook, for right before him were many clearly-cut, fresh, and deeply-marked foot-prints, the like of which he remembered to have only once seen, and that was now long ago, when, as a poor flying slave, he sought a refuge in a dreary and well-nigh in-

accessible, fever-breeding swamp. The footprints were the footprints of the almost extinct fierce black bear. Only a hundred and fifty years ago herds of wild buffaloes grazed in peace within a dozen miles of Charleston itself. The buffalo, however, is gone, but here and there in swampy Carolina solitudes the savage black bear still lives on. Hunger had driven one of these dreaded and ferocious creatures forth. It had passed by the praying negro in the night. Abram had desired in his heart that the Almighty would speak just once again ; and to Abram, as he gazed awe-struck at the footprints of the bear, it was made manifest that the Almighty had not only spoken once more, but also that he had stooped down from on high, and, in characters clear and unmistakable, written his message on the ground.

Besides Abram and the bear, another restless spirit was abroad

that night. Heedless alike of the benumbing silence and the horrid blackness of the woods, there went forth in the dread hours yet another. Long after midnight, when the old nurse lit a candle and went groping for her spectacles on the window-ledge, she saw a face flattened against the misty pane, and a pair of wild, weary eyes staring straight up into her own. The poor old woman gasped, the candle fell from her hands, and she sank shivering on to the floor. But when she awoke her charge, and procured a light, and found courage to go to the window again, the haggard yellow face and staring eyes were gone.

Ah, yes ; who else, indeed, but Widder Wyning could it be ? From the moment when that poor, unhappy woman first heard her child was actually still alive, and not dead as she thought, she had not known one moment's peace. She became feverish and restless, and

her manner toward the fine black infant grew hourly more unaccountable and strange. To Widder Wyning's mother it seemed safer that the child should be removed altogether out of sight. For more reasons indeed than one it would be much better out of sight. The hateful little thing must not, of course, die—that is to say, it must not die, except naturally. At all events, the brat must not starve, for that would inevitably lead to consequences even in South Carolina. A girl-mother who would nurse it for a trifle must be found at once. And as girl-mothers were always very plentiful and always very poor, such an arrangement was easily and quickly made. And in this wise did the luckless little ebony member of the house of White disappear for a time from view.

So then from the moment when Widder Wyning first heard that the child was actually still alive, and



not dead as she supposed, she had not known a moment's peace. Anguish like hers could not be concealed. Nor could it have been borne in silence by any of the deeply emotional class to which she belonged. Her mother saw all the outward and visible signs of her distracted mind, and she thought, as she believed she had good cause to think, that her daughter's suffering arose either entirely from grief or entirely from shame. And accordingly it was from these points of view that she tried to administer to her daughter a few crumbs of comfort. Her daughter need not be afraid of her husband—that red-headed white man. No ; her husband should never know. But even if he found out after all that a child had really been born while he was away, it would be easy to show that it died soon after its birth. And as for the shame—well, what was the shame? Nothing was a

shame while you kept it unknown. And where was the woman in Pine Open who would care to cast the first stone? To Widder Wyning all this ought to have been very consoling; but it was clearly the reverse of consoling, and her mother became greatly exercised in her mind.

Widder Wyning, of course, now wanted her child. She wanted her revenge, too. But she saw clearly enough that she could not have both. And that her desire for revenge was far stronger than her desire for her child is plain, because the child she might have had in a moment, and merely for the asking. But no. She would be revenged on Loo for robbing her of Abram. And she would be revenged on Abram for passing her over and marrying Loo. She would destroy their living. She would ruin their home. She would break their hearts. She would

blast their name. And when at last Abram White turned away with loathing from his wife—turned away as from a leper or the plague—then should he have back his child. Yes, then, but not before. And in the meanwhile she, Widder Wynning, would play the bosom friend. She would then see their tears. She would then hear their prayers. She would catch the first curse. She would then note the growing hate. She would watch for the first blow. She would become the hourly eye-witness of the gradual break-up of all the holiest ties of heart and home. Oh, what joy! And over and above it all she would become the ministering angel to her own dear child. Oh, what joy, what joy!

And this part of the sweet bosom friend she played to perfection, as we shall see. That it would be a matter of the greatest difficulty to establish a footing in Loo's house Widder Wynning knew. None

better. But that this footing should be established, and established firmly, too, she was determined, even if she had to establish it on her knees. But it took time to do all she wished ; it took a long time ; it took weeks and weeks ; and to her hurrying, revengeful spirit those weeks and weeks seemed like years and years. Every day did she send someone to ask kindly about both Loo and the child. And then, as she fancied she could detect here and there some little signs of softening, she began to send twice a day, and later even three or four times. And frequently these persistent, thoughtful, neighborly inquiries were accompanied by offers of the hundred little things so useful to all negro babies and nourishing for all negro mammas. And at last came a day when one of these little offerings was accepted. Abram and Loo could hold out no longer,

for to them the offerings were a sign of a contrite, humbled heart, and to keep the door of pity and forgiveness any longer tightly shut against a pleading, penitent soul was precisely what these two young people could never bring themselves to do. Then quickly following the accepted offer came a day, too, when little yellow Widder Wyning, in crumpled white muslin and shabby pink bows, appeared for an instant at Loo's door in person.

"Yo's well off, Loo Adams," she said sadly, and with tears in her eyes. "Yo's cause to t'ank de Lo'd. I ain'. De Lo'd gave me a chile, an' de Lo'd's took'd it away. I ain' 'low'd to hab it, po' t'ing. Dey says I ain' fit to nuss it. An' yo's jes' 'bout mad 'cause dat po' chile o' your'n ain' ezactly coal-black, like yo' an' Ab'm is. If de chile dies, yo' ain' gwine t'ink 'bout de color den, is yo'?" And walking away from the door she sobbed, "I

ain' care if my chile's red, or white, or blue, s'long's it's jes what de A'mighty gib me." But time was required to bring the two women properly face to face. However, as the ice was broken, Widder Wynning's course was clear. She called again and again, lingering each time a little longer at the door. But the little brass knocker on the door worried her terribly. Whenever she approached the door, it was always with face averted ; and whenever she knocked, she knocked with her knuckles. But to the little brass knocker she raised neither hand nor eye.

After a time Widder Wynning begged that the child might be taken occasionally to see her. And what gentle, forgiving Christian soul, seeing such sorrow and humble contrition of heart, could well refuse? At all events, it was clearly not in the nature of Abram and Loo to refuse ; so the child was taken,

as Widder Wyning desired—taken often and staying long, staying so long, indeed, at times that Loo was obliged to fetch it away herself, and at last it came to pass that Abram was actually obliged to go himself from time to time to bring back Loo. And in like manner did Widder Wyning go to the cottage of the White's. To live apart from the baby seemed impossible. How completely she was now established in the minister's home may be gathered from her one day asking Abram to take down the little brass knocker and put it away. And this, while wondering greatly at such a strange request, good-natured Abram did. So far, then, Widder Wyning felt she had reason to be satisfied. Certainly it was better infinitely, from every point of view, than prowling about in the dead of night to listen with surging veins and trembling limbs and savage hunger to her infant's cry.

## CHAPTER VI.

AFTER his reception at the Flats, some may be disposed to believe that Abram rather imprudently laid himself open to further insult by going to meeting on the following Sunday. But the temptation was far too great to be resisted by any poor man of color, and accordingly Abram went. And he went as the officiating minister, with all the well-accustomed books tucked importantly under his arm—the books he loved so well, books which he could barely read. He arrived in time, in ample time. But the service had already begun. He opened the door. A new minister was there. Nevertheless Abram went in, although every soul in the congregation turned round on his knees to look at him. He took a



place at the back, and stood up, or knelt down, or joined in the hymn, with a reverence and composure that almost took away their breath. The congregation meant that their secret of the new minister should be a grievous blow, and they were astonished and angry, and, it may be, even a little ashamed, to see their blow fall so flat. The sermon was leveled, in the first place, at Abram's wife, and in the second at Abram himself, for taking part in her crime and shielding her all through her shame. But somehow the sermon also fell flat. From the beginning of the discourse to the end, Abram's patient, sorrowful eyes were fixed on the preacher ; and do what he would, the preacher could not get on. But the collection that morning was the best ever known in Pine Open. It was meant to be the best. Yet even the collection fell flat, for in the middle of the last hymn a brawny white arm

reached through the window and carefully lifted out the plate and all it contained. The worshipers were paralyzed. Everyone saw what was being done, but nobody moved. They all looked on with mouths wide open, just as if in the middle of a note they had suddenly been struck quite dumb. Then drawing in a long, deep breath, they recovered themselves and yelled, and then moved down upon the door in a mass. But the door was locked and the key was gone. Now, this was awkward, for the only other means of exit were the windows; and the windows were rather small and rather high, and the end of the crinoline in that quarter was not yet. And the end of chivalry was not yet, for the gentlemen gallantly turned their faces to the wall while the ladies, with many a shriek of laughter, mounted the forms and wriggled through the windows with what grace they could.

On the following morning Abrâm was at work betimes in his pit. Never before had he thrown out so much marl in so short a time. The truth is, he suffered no interruption. Nobody came to beg his matches or his tobacco. Nobody came to borrow his pick, or his spade, or his shovel, or his barrow. Nobody asked him to fill up a truck, or run a truck up from the washer, or run a truck down, or catch a mule. Nobody spoke to him. Nobody looked at him. For a time Abram bore all this pretty well, but it soon began to pall. And when he wanted a truck for himself, a truck was not to be had. Nor was a mule to be had. It is true that after watching a day and and a half he secured a truck, but then it was the very worst truck on the place. But now more than half of his marl was gone. When he threw into the truck what marl was left, and started the truck

back for the washer, a wheel came off. When it was emptied and the wheel put on, and when the truck was filled once more and once more started down the line, it almost immediately ran off the rails and, turning over, emptied its load into a pit full of water. To be sure, occurrences like these were certainly not usual, but Abram tried to bring himself to believe that they were merely accidents notwithstanding. But these accidents happened continually. And they became at last, even for Abram, far too hard to bear. So one afternoon he quietly shouldered his tools and walked off the ground, and the Flats knew him no more.

Loo was waiting for him that afternoon in the wood. She saw him while yet he was afar off ; but still she waited, leaning against a tree. One reason why she did not start eagerly forward to meet him was because her knees trembled so

violently. Another reason was that she had a ravenous longing to get to the very bottom of Abram's secret soul. All unknown to him, she had long watched, like a lynx, for the faintest trace of wavering or falling away. But she watched in vain. Abram's faith in the woman he loved was like the house builded on a rock. All around was a swirl of flood and storm, but the house stood fast, and his faith was unabated. To the rich, the odium of the rich can never be nearly so hopelessly crushing as the odium of the poor to the poor. But Loo felt that she could bear up easily against all the odium of all the world, provided her husband bore up too. On the other hand, if he fell away, she felt that she would die. She felt that she ought to die. The resolve to die, if he fell away, had taken definite shape already in her heart. And so she stood leaning against the tree, try-

ing to read, as he approached, what was working in his mind. It was easy enough to see what was working in her own mind, poor soul, for that anxious, fearful look, those hungry, burning eyes, those chattering white teeth, those twitching vermilion lips, those working fingers and those trembling knees, all told the same sad tale, and told it all too well. But the moment she caught her husband's eye her fears and tremblings vanished. She flew toward him like the wind, and the poor fellow, propping up his tools against a stump, and secretly drawing the back of his hand over his eyes, took her in his arms, and folded her to his breast.

"Den yo' ain' gwine no mo' to de Flats," she said after a while, taking note of the tools. "Well, I is glad, Ab'm, ole boy. I'd radder lib on nuttin', den let yo' go dare any mo'."

"No," he said hoarsely, "it's

wuss'n been daid. Come 'long, honey." And once more shouldering his tools, they walked home in silence hand in hand—the downcast, slouching, rough-looking black laborer, and the bare-headed, lithe young negress in neat black frock and large white apron, who glanced swiftly and anxiously from time to time up into her companion's troubled and weary-looking face.

Now, this was a meeting which Widder Wyning was most anxious to see. And she was permitted to see it. She followed Loo into the wood. She saw everything that passed, and the sight caused her to clench her little yellow hands so tight that her finger nails cut into the palms. Flying back to Loo's cottage, she threw herself on her knees beside the cradle, and lifting up her hand above the sleeping infant, she whispered savagely in its ear that if it were only Loo's own child really, and not her own, she

would kill it. Yes, and from her look she could have drunk its blood.

The outlook now was dark in the extreme. For not only was Abram's work quite gone, but Loo's work also was quite gone. The hotels and the steamships had placed their washing elsewhere. People disliked to have Loo Adams about. People who had employed her and trusted her disliked even to hear her name. Here and there, indeed, a word of pity might have been heard for Loo ; but for Abram not a single word of pity was ever heard anywhere. Had anyone employed him, the rest of the hands would have at once struck work. But in truth work could hardly be said to be had. Capital was gone. The employers of labor were scattered. Many had perished in the war. In spots retired the plaintive music of the old plantation songs still filled the evening air, but the plantations themselves were rapidly relapsing



into a wilderness of impenetrable jungle and prairie wilds.

One day, however, Abram happened to be in exactly the right place at exactly the right moment. Some white men who were at work on Fort Sumter had overloaded their boat, and she appeared to be sinking, but Abram came to the rescue and put matters right. Out of this simple affair an engagement arose, and Abram was employed at the fort at two dollars a day. For a week or more after settling down to work, it was Abram's custom to go down alone every day into one of the casements to eat his dinner and rest. The chamber was cool and most reposeful, and quite shut off from the noise of the other men. The great gun, mounted on a massively built carriage almost as tall as Abram himself, still pointed sternly seaward through the port-hole, as if quite ready to speak once more with the ships at the bar. But

the carriage on which it rested was a wreck, and the walls and the roof and the slanting floor were a wreck too—a shell had been there. To the little band of heroes grouped around the gun in that cramped and low-roofed chamber, there had come one awful fraction of a second, followed by the unbroken stillness of eternity.

Sitting down under the gun, with his back against the carriage, Abram ate his dinner, and then smoked his pipe and thought of home. Then he fell to thinking of poor Widder Wyning, and of her kindness to them in all their trouble. Yet he could not help wishing very earnestly that Widder Wyning would not be so desperately fond of their child. This was a point on which Loo was growing anxious. She was becoming afraid that Widder Wyning would run off with the child altogether. But this was really absurd, and Abram laughed. He

laughed out loud. And the more he thought of this funny idea of Widder Wyning stealing the baby, the louder and longer he laughed. And it was the first time, too, that he had laughed since the baby was born. But all at once he became aware that somebody else was laughing also. Lifting his head, lo and behold! he saw Widder Wyning herself standing at the porthole and quietly smiling down upon him from the outside.

“Gracious!” she exclaimed; “how yo’ does laugh. Yo’ll shake dat ole cannon down on de top’n yo’ haid, fo’ sho’. What is yo’ laugh fo’, sah?” Now this was very awkward. Abram was confused. He could hardly tell the truth, and he hated to tell a lie. So he tried to get out of the difficulty by asking how she came there.

“I’se espectin’ my husband, sah,” she replied, glancing seaward; “his

ship's at de bar. I'se got bad news fo' yo', po' man. Dat's to say," she continued, with a searching glance at Abram, "it 'ud be bad news fo' a'mos' mos' men. Yo' baby's daid, sah." Abram came to his feet with a bound, striking his head violently against the cannon, the force of the blow driving his strong white teeth clean through the thick wooden stem of his pipe, the head falling to the ground and rolling away. Abram sat down again with a groan.

"Is yo' groan fo' yo' baby or yo' haid?" asked Widder Wyning sarcastically. "If it's jes' put on, lem me tell yo' it ain' becomin'—leastways, not in a minister. Yo'll say yo' lov'd de po' chile nex', hey?" Abram buried his face in his hands and only moaned by way of reply.

"Ah, well! hollerin' won't mend it, Mr. Ab'm, sah," the terrible little person continued; "yo' should a' hollered befo'. A man

what's so mighty proud of him faith in him wife ain' no call t' holler like dat." But no. Proud of his faith he was not, he said, shaking his head. Of what had such a poor black nigger to be proud? Well, yes, he was proud of his wife; and, yes, he had faith in his wife. You might cut him to pieces, but you couldn't cut out his faith. His faith lived in his last drop of blood.

"Aha, dem's mighty fine words! Pulpit words. But tell me dis: when yo' chile was cross an' hollerin' at night, did yo' ebber get out'n yo' baid an' walk yo' baby about? Aha, yo' shakes yo' haid! No. Well, is yo' say ole Ab'm an' Isaac 'ud call dat sort o' t'ing faith in yo' wife?" Abram groaned aloud.

"An' when de po' chile was sick, did yo' nuss it? Did yo' ebber take dat chile jes' once on yo' knee? An' did yo'," continued the relentless little woman, looking severely through the porthole, "an'

did yo' ebber gib yo' chile jes' one little kiss? Did yo' ebber hold its tiny little hand no bigger'n yo' fum in yo' own? Aha, an' listen! Yo' is ce't'n'y a mos' pow'ful man in prayer, Ab'm White. All de wuld knows dat. Yo' prays mighty hard fo' ebberybody and ebberybody's child'n—but, Ab'm, did yo' ebber say one little prayer or ax one little blessin' fo' de po' little chile what's yo' own?" Again Abram groaned, swaying his body to and fro.

"Ah, no, yo' ain' done none o' dese t'ings, an' now de po' chile's daid, an' yo's a-sobbin' fit to break yo' heart, an' yo'r tears is a-squeezin' froo yo'r fingers jes' like rain. But tears ain' gwine to fetch dat po' chile back. Heaven 'ud soon be putty empty, if tears could. But yo'r faith ain' wuff welly much, sah, so yo' see. If yo' ain' lub de chile, I guess you ain' lub de mudder."

"But I do lub de mudder!" cried Abram, leaping to his feet. But,

ah—stop. What was this? Widder Wyning had vanished. What was it—what did it mean? He went to the porthole and looked out. He looked all around; he looked all over the sea, he looked all over the sky. But Widder Wyning had vanished. Widder Wyning certainly stood there, just there at the porthole; and yet how could she stand just there in all that water? Clearly that was not a possible thing. Odd? To be sure, it was odd. And rubbing his wet eyes with the back of his hand he stood there, breaking his heart about the baby, and wondering what kind of a miracle had happened.

By and by his eye fell on the pipe in his half-open hand, and his mind wandered off to the terrible crack he had given his head against the gun, and he put up his hand to feel his crown. But his hat was still on, and his hat was not smashed. Then

just as slowly his mind went back to the pipe. A man's teeth must be iron to cut through a stem like—and then, like a flash, he saw that it had all been a dream. The pipe was all a dream, the blow was all a dream, Widder Wyning herself was all a dream! Thank God! Hurrah! His child was not dead, after all. Thank God again! Hurrah again! He would show Widder Wyning whether he loved his wife and child. And for the very first time in his life he dashed his hat and his pipe into a corner, and flying round once, twice, he flung body and soul into the wildest and most terrific breakdown ever danced by civilized colored man. Some of the hands who were passing saw it; but they hurried away to tell their mates to mind what they were doing, because that big black giant, Abram White, had gone stark staring mad.



## CHAPTER VII.

THAT Abram could work that afternoon was out of the question. He was too much excited and too completely unstrung. Obtaining leave of absence without much difficulty, and hailing a passing boat to put him ashore, he ran round to the office, and lifting his fortnightly pay of twenty-four dollars, he quickly bought a whole basketful of the daintiest eatables and drinkables—from a colored point of view—that Charleston could provide. Then away he went on his four-mile walk for home. His pace was prodigious. Idle negroes loitering on the road looked after him in amazement. There was something that afternoon about Abram White that they certainly had never seen before. Now

what was it? Abram, however, looked neither to the right nor to the left, but with the basket in one hand, and his boots in the other, and his head away up, he kept steadily straight on for home.

Turning a sharp bend near Pine Open, Abram came suddenly upon his wife and Widder Wyning standing in the middle of the deep sandy road, just where the trees met overhead.

"Hi, Loo!" he cried, in a loud cheery voice, as he strode up to the women and flung down his boots, "jes' yo' take a hold on dis basket, an' gib me a hold on dat chile."

Loo looked at him astonished. What had happened to the man?

"No," she replied, casting a swift, frightened glance behind her.

"No; men-folks is comin'. No, Abe, don't; dey'll see yo'!"

Abram had laid his hands upon the baby and was taking it by force.

“I don’ care, Loo, if all de men on earf is comin’. Let go!”

And Loo did let go. Nevertheless, she shrank visibly from letting her husband be seen by men-folks, as she called them, carrying that doubtful little child. But through the straggling line of loafers that now appeared in the road Abram marched like a king. Never before had he so much as even held the child in his arms; but now he not only held it, and smiled at it, and laughed at it, but he actually talked to it, whistled to it, sang to it, shouted to it. And not only did he do all this, but he actually dandled it too, and threw it up and down in the air, until the poor little pinch of humanity fairly gasped again. Ah! and at this extraordinary outburst of affection for his child, Loo went almost wild with delight. It was the one supreme moment for which she had prayed without ceasing, night and day, ever since the

child was born. It was the very crown and topmost pinnacle of her life. Doubt was at an end. His faith had triumphed. Her cup was full. And now, let sorrows multiply. Let mischief breed apace. Let the day end, and life close. Let the night begin, and the grave open. She no longer cared. Abram's faith had triumphed, and her cup was full.

But suddenly all this joyful harmony and all the stillness of the quiet woodland road was rudely broken by a loud, discordant cry, a loud, discordant laugh, piercing and mocking, and echoing in its mockery far and wide. Abram and Loo started and looked at each other, and stood still. Glancing behind them, they saw Widder Wyning standing with the men who had just passed by on the road. She was pointing at Abram with her finger.

"Look!" she shrieked, grasping one of the men by the arm.

**“Look—look at dat nigger husban’ !  
look at him nussin’ a white man’s  
chile ! Look !”**

The sight was more than Widder Wyning could bear. Loo’s triumph seemed to have unsettled her reason. She shrieked again and again and again, and then, losing herself utterly in a fit of hysterical rage, she flung herself down, and clawed and bit at the very dust in the road.

That night Loo’s child was taken ill. Next day it was worse. Then came Widder Wyning in tears and great humility. Might she come in ? No. Well, might she hold the poor baby in her arms for just two minutes ? No. Well, for one minute ? No. Half a minute ? No. Then Widder Wyning went down on her knees and put up her thin yellow hands in supplication and prayer. She was wicked, she cried. She was bad. She had done wrong. To behave on the road as she did she was mad. She

was always mad. God made her mad. So now would they let her in? No. Might she just touch its hand? No. Then might she just look into its eyes through the window? No. Well, here were two hundred dollars—all the money she had? No. And her shop and her house besides, if she might just come in? No. And the door was closed inexorably in her face. “Ah, what devils!” she moaned. And she knelt there, with her forehead on the step. All that night Widder Wyning crept round and round Abram’s cottage, pausing from time to time, and, like some wild animal robbed of its young, listening eagerly with bated breath at a window or at the door whenever she thought she heard the little sufferer cry.

Abram and Loo were now seriously afraid of Widder Wyning. Superstition had begun to stir. The vivid Fort Sumter dream had

become most alarmingly real. Widder Wyning was a witch. It appeared to them now that she had hungered and thirsted for their child ever since it was born. She had played the part of befriending angel and bosom friend with a craft that was absolutely devilish. It was not a woman that pointed that withering finger at them on the public road, and shrieked that withering cry. No, it was the fiend ; it was the fiend incarnate ! Human beings do not turn with such hellish suddenness as that to rend their friends. No ; Widder Wyning had a devil ! Was not every word of it all in the Bible ? Yes, and Widder Wyning was a witch ; that's what she was, a witch !

One feels sorry that Abram and Loo should think such thoughts ; but it is no more than just to bear in mind what Abram and Loo really were, and to remember that they were well-nigh broken-hearted, and

that these things were said when scalding tears were splashing heavily on hands clasped convulsively together across the cradle of a dying child.

Like nearly all poor people of their class, Abram and Loo called in the doctor when it was altogether too late. And the little apothecary came somewhat reluctantly. He had known Abram and Loo, but, like everyone else, he had turned his back upon them the moment he heard their story. There was no hope, he said, rising from his knees after looking at the baby carefully. The child was dying. "Whose child was it?" he asked. Abram and Loo looked up from the cradle with a quick glance of surprise. Why, it was their child? The doctor frowned. "But that's——" He was going to say, "But that's impossible." The doctor had intended to go straight away. But he now sat down, fastening a long, steady,



questioning look upon the pair who knelt by the cradle, each holding a tiny, motionless hand. But they took no more notice of him. The doctor felt that he had wounded them, and presently he took up his hat and quietly left the room.

"Oh, how mean," he muttered angrily, as he stepped out into the air, "how mean and detestable a trick it is to believe everything one hears!" As if the wise men of the East had not been dinning it into his ears ever since he was a child!

Hurrying across the corner of the wood where we have seen Widder Wyning hurrying, the little apothecary made for the other end of Pine Open. He knew where he could find the nurse who had nursed Abram's wife, and he wished to question her. Even in a perfectly civilized community when a medical man tears along at a great pace, with his hat on the back of his head and his fists clenched,

people are still rather apt to turn round and wonder what is the matter. But at Pine Open everybody who was at home promptly turned out and followed him. Reaching the cabin where the nurse was engaged, the doctor called that venerable lady out; and out she came, followed by a dozen slatternly-looking women. Stepping up on to the stump of a tree, the doctor addressed the rapidly growing multitude.

“Now,” he said, “you folks of Pine Open have been guilty of a terrible crime!” The doctor’s voice was loud and angry, and the people instantly thought of the police. “Yes,” he continued, “a terrible crime. You have blasted the life and utterly ruined the finest man and woman of color I ever knew. All the misery and mischief you have done to Abram White and his wife I don’t know. No, nor you yourselves don’t know. But you

will know, mark me, when the Almighty takes hold of you in the Day of Judgment! But something will happen to you before the Day of Judgment, mind you! In three days you Pine Open folks will be the laughing-stock of all the Southern States. So long as any colored man or woman can laugh, all you fathers and mothers will be laughed at for saying and believing that a pure-bred black like Abram's wife could have a white baby. Why, you foolish wicked people you—why, if Loo's husband was the very whitest man that ever lived, could her child be as white as the child that is dying this very moment in her arms? Could it? Speak up!" But the people appeared to be struck quite dumb.

"Ah, you won't speak," continued the doctor. "Never mind. But you have all seen that child. Now, have you not?"

"Yes," they shouted, "Widder

Wyning took it about for folks to laugh at."

"Ah, to laugh at! Never mind. White folks live around here. Now who are they, and where are they? Speak up!" No, they replied in a chorus, no white folks lived around there at all.

"What!" shouted the doctor, shaking his fist, "do you tell me a lie? Why, I saw only a minute ago a little woman nearly white standing at a store."

"Aha, Widder Wyning!" they yelled excitedly. "Widder Wyning's got a white man—Widder Wyning's got a white man! Yah, a sailor man, a white man wid a red head. Aha, yah! an' Loo's baby's got a red head. Aha!" The excitement was growing apace. People were running up from all parts.

"Silence!" roared the doctor, waving his hat violently up and down, as if trying to beat off the din. "Stop, I tell you! Now, has

Widder Wyning had a baby?"

"Yes," they yelled.

"When?" he demanded. "Same time as Loo," was the answer.

"Where is that baby?" No answer; nothing but wide open mouths.

"Has anyone ever seen that baby?" Again no answer—nothing but staring at each other in utter, dumfounded, blank amazement.

"Jehoshaphat! Well, I ask once more. Has anyone ever seen that baby?"

"Yes; I'se seen de baby."

"You? Who are you?" cried the doctor, looking up into the trees above his head.

"Who, me? I'se Mo' Smiff, boss." And he was standing on a branch, peering timidly down from behind the old tree trunk. He had only that morning been let out of jail, where he had been detained for the theft at Marl Flats.

“Aha! And when did you see the baby, my man, and where?”

“I seed it de mawnin’ I was took’d off to quad.” And in a nervous, highly-pitched voice he went on to say that he was looking through the window when he saw Widder Wyning get out of bed, roll up her own baby, which was white, and which appeared to be dead, take it to Loo’s, leave it at Loo’s, and bring back Loo’s big, black baby instead. And he knew where the girl lived who was nursing it.

“Come down!” yelled the mob; “come down!” And Mo’ Smiff did come down. He came down quick, for the angry mob began to pelt him mercilessly with whatever came to hand. But so threatening was everybody’s aspect, that as soon as his feet touched the ground Mo’ bolted like a stag straight into the woods, followed by a deep, savage roar.

“Widder Wyning’s a witch,” cried a woman.

“Burn her !” cried everybody, “burn her !” And then, with a howl that was hardly human, the mob swept past the horrified little doctor and bore swiftly down upon the unhappy Widder Wyning’s cottage. In less than five minutes the cottage was in a blaze, and the maddened black savages were yelling and dancing round the flames like a suddenly disbanded legion of devils.

But Widder Wyning was not in the fire. Something in the ominous roar of the multitude had warned her to flee while there was yet time, and she now stood afar off watching the greedy, licking flames, and the dense and slowly-rolling inky smoke, and listening to the hoarse wild cries of the savage mob careering hand in hand around the ruins of her living and her home. Ah, yes, she watched the fire and she watched the smoke, and she listened to the cries of the wild, careering

mob, but her watching and her listening were the watching and the listening of a mere spectator who had neither part in the matter nor lot in the matter. Before her eyes stood something far more than the fire and the smoke, and the blotting out of her living and her home. Before her eyes stood Abram's cottage. And in Abram's cottage her child lay dying. Between a burning store and a baby sinking softly back into the unbroken peace and unclouded joy of the life eternal, there is to a mother, there is to even a wicked mother, all the difference that lies between the poles. All this difference there was now to Widder Wyning.

She had now no home. And she had now no child. The child was dead. Once or twice Widder Wyning had set out for Charleston to fetch Loo's child back, and so in a measure to make such poor amends as she could. But the Evil Spirit



met her in the way and compelled her to return. Once when she set out the Evil Spirit stopped her and whispered: "It is too soon; think of your revenge!" At another time—yesterday only—the Evil Spirit whispered bitingly: "It is too late; think of your disgrace!"

She had now nowhere to lay her burning, aching head. All that night she paced wildly round and round Abram's cottage, listening from time to time with her ear against the wall to catch the faintest cry. But no baby cried that night. No sad little wail was there. There was, indeed, a sound now and then, a sound as of a half-stifled, convulsive, heart-broken sob, but that was all. And all night long Widder Wyning kept whispering to the cottage walls, "Give me my dead child, give me my dead child." And she whispered it to the trees, and to the drifting clouds, and to the steady, eternal stars—holding

up her trembling little yellow hands and whispering, "Give me my dead child."

At break of day the engine-man at Marl Flats, who had been detained all night stopping a hole in the boiler, saw Widder Wyning talking to a tree near Abram's house. Like everyone else in Pine Open, this worthy person faithfully believed that Widder Wyning had been burned, together with all her belongings. As nobody would talk to a tree, especially at such a strange time of day, but a witch, the engine-man thought it would only be an act of Christian kindness to notify Abram of what was going on at his door. It might be no more than prudent to be on friendly terms with Abram now, anyway. So he knocked. And when Abram appeared he pointed to Widder Wyning, taking it for granted that Abram knew all that had happened the day before. Abram was greatly

obliged. But as soon as the engine-man was out of sight, Abram walked up to Widder Wyning, took her by the hand, and led her gently into his house.

"Give me my dead child," she whispered, "give me my dead child." And all the time she remained under Abram's roof—which, indeed, was not very long—she repeated these words incessantly. Closing the bedroom door so that his wife might not be disturbed, Abram lit the fire and made some tea. But Widder Wyning would not look at the tea, nor at the biscuit, nor at anything. "Give me my dead child," she whispered, and that was all. "Give me my dead child !"

As the engine-man was not slow in spreading the news that Widder Wyning was still alive, all Pine Open immediately went out in search of her. They were fools, they said, to suppose they could set fire to a

witch. She was a brand of the devil, and the devil stood by to pluck all such from the burning. But this time they would drown her. No witch could float, at all events, thank God ! Water would quench her eternally. Now, that Abram could fail to hear those threats, or in any way misunderstand them, was impossible. So quietly stepping to a cupboard, he took out his old Minie rifle and a handful of belts and straps, together with his cartridge box and bayonet. From the way Abram bit the cartridge, rammed home the bullet, put on the cap, and fixed on the thin, cold steel, it was easy to see that he had once been a soldier. Already we have seen our minister, in defense of his wife's good name, knock out his man, and now with the quietness and dexterity born only of the highest kind of courage and the sternest kind of training, we behold him preparing, with lead and with

iron, to do battle with a mob on behalf even of poor Widder Wyning. What a minister, to be sure ! And yet how fiery St. Peter would have loved this man ! However, the shouting throng passed by. They fancied, of course, that Abram now knew all, and accordingly that his house would be the last spot on earth to afford shelter to the widow.

But in less than half an hour the crowd returned, and halted before the door. A voice was heard—a white man's voice—and with a cry of recognition Widder Wyning sprang past Abram and flung the door wide open. But Abram also was quick. Swinging her lightly back he stepped to the front, completely blocking the doorway with his massive, gigantic form.

“What is it, men ?” he said quietly. And he stood at ease, as if on parade, with the rifle resting in the hollow of his arm.

“It is this”—and a savage-looking, red-headed white man in a sleeveless blue cotton jumper, whose arms were tatooed from wrist to shoulder, strode forward, dragging with him Mo’ Smiff and a ragged young negress, who bore in her arms a fine black baby—“it is this : That gibbering devil in muslin and pink bows is my wife, and this howling little nigger here’s her child. So let me in.”

At that moment a wagon dashed round the corner, and in it were the doctor and several policemen from Charleston. The crowd fell back.

“Oh, yes, I’ll let yo’ in !” returned Abram simply ; and he allowed the sailor man, and Mo’ Smiff, and the woman with the baby to pass inside. But Abram kept his hand on the sailor’s arm.

“Look here !” shouted the sailor to his wife, “I came here to kill you ; but it’s clear from this black fellow here and the police, I can’t.

But here's your black brat,"—and plucking the infant roughly out of the young woman's arms, he flung it roughly into Widder Wyning's lap,—"and," he continued furiously, "hurry up and father it on the proper man, and may the Lord turn it into a devil's millstone and hang it round the neck of both of you !"

Then turning, he threw off Abram's hand and strode from the room, swearing that he would ship again that day and never more return. Widder Wyning was paralyzed with terror. She was speechless. She seemed turned to stone. And everyone present seemed suddenly struck dumb. It was only that morning that the sailor's vessel arrived in port, and Mo' Smiff had boarded her as soon as she was made fast, and without a word of explanation had taken the unhappy husband to see his first-born child. Mo' Smiff had gradually begun to realize while in prison that by keeping silence on

a matter so grave he was doing a very great wrong. He determined to put it right. And this is how he did it.

By and by this extraordinary and painful tension began to relax, and then the doctor came forward and made Mo' Smiff repeat once more all he knew. The young woman who had nursed the child also gave evidence. Turning to Widder Wying, the sergeant of police, who had also come in, asked her if she heard what was said, and if it was true, and if she had anything to say. Yes, she had heard, she whispered, and it was all true, all. Now, would they give her her dead child? The living child Abram and Loo had not touched. The dead child was in the other room, and the father and mother kept a watchful eye upon the door. "No," their determined-looking faces said, "we will not give her our dead child."

Last of all the old nurse ap-



peared. Not a soul, she said, was present at the actual moment of the child's birth. Then putting on her large, brass-rimmed spectacles, she drew from her underskirt pocket a little roll of papers. If those papers, she said, did not prove who was the mother of the white baby, then nothing would. Everybody, except Widder Wyning, crowded round the little table to look. They were the receipted bills of the wholesale traders who supplied Widder Wyning with goods. The money had been collected and the receipts given the day before the child was born, and the nurse had found these papers under the child when she first lifted it out of bed.

"Now, Widow Wyning——" said the sergeant looking round. Every eye glanced the same way. But Widder Wyning was gone. Abram and Loo rushed to the dead baby. But the dead baby was gone, too.

Then suddenly arose a savage, ominous yell, "Lynch him, lynch him!" followed by the swift, heavy rush of a multitude of feet; and Abram and Loo, and all the people who had crowded into the bedroom with Abram and Loo, looked out of the window by which Widder Wyning had escaped, and they saw Mo' Smiff with Abram's rifle. They saw him run, they saw him stop, wheel round, and put his toe upon the trigger, they heard his thrilling, desperate cry:

"No, no! I'se gwine to lynch myself!" They saw him look toward the cottage, they saw him wave his hand, they saw the flash, they saw him fall.

While the dead white baby was in the house Abram and Loo paid little heed to their own live black child. Their strong affection was not to be transferred like baby's clothes. Yet nature triumphed in the end. Affection grew. At first

the child was tied securely in its little chair and set between them, but yet far apart. They looked at it askance. And they compared it, to its disadvantage, with the baby that was gone. Little by little, however, it crept into their hearts and twined itself about their humble lives, and in its joyousness and captivating baby ways their sorrows were in time well-nigh forgotten. Yet long afterward, and at moments, too, when their hearts were full of thankfulness and joy, a remembrance would flash in upon them, and unobserved by each other they would then steal away to hide the rising tear.

Late that night—and the moon was nearly full—a Charleston policeman stopped and questioned a fragile little yellow woman, dressed in an old white muslin frock and faded pink-colored bows, whither was she hurrying so fast, and what was that in her arms?

Oh, was she hurrying, then, so very fast? She didn't know, but she would walk slower, if he wished. She was hurrying to her husband, that was all, taking her poor dear child to its father. The child was asleep. And it slept so still, it looked so calm,—just like that moon, dear policeman,—so bright, so full of rest, so full of peace, so full of joy! Would the policeman touch its forehead for a moment—touch it there? And taking the policeman's hand she laid it on the icy marble brow. The policeman shuddered and walked away.

Speeding away in the direction of the shipping, Widder Wyning pushed her way through a crowd of people who had just then landed from the English steamer. Still speeding along she reached the end of the now deserted wharf, and there she paused, looking out on the broad, still, shining water. A

smile stole over her face, a child-like smile. She appeared to see something which pleased her, for she bent her head and whispered something into the baby's little dead ear, and pointed joyfully seaward with her small yellow hand. How it trembled in the moonlight, that small yellow hand! "Yes," she whispered and lisped, "that is the ship, my child; she is waiting for us, she is sailing now quite slow. Ah, yes, she is waiting for us, be sure. And, oh, what a heavenly ship, all silvery bright, and oh, do look at the silver hands of the man at the wheel, and the silver pilot there in the bow, and, oh, how his face does shine, my child! What did you say one day when you came out of school, 'My father's at the helm'? Oh, yes, he is there, with the silver hands and the shining brow, there at the helm of the silver ship, and see how they gather about him, his

silver crew! Look, they wave to us, child! Let us go." And going to the side of the wharf she peered over the edge, and there saw a very small boat carelessly left, and but lately used. Casting off the painter, and hauling up the boat to a more convenient place, she stepped with a practised foot on board. She was a waterman's child and could handle a small boat well. Tying the child to her bosom with her shawl, she hoisted the lug, hauled aft the sheet, sat down in the stern and took hold of the tiller. A gentle breeze was blowing, and the little craft was quickly out upon the broad expanse of still and shining water. She steered for the silver ship. She steered for it all that night. She steered for it all next day. And she steered for it all the night after. Her burning eyes were fixed immovably upon the stern of the silver ship, and upon the shining

faces and the beckoning hands of the silver crew. At last she hauled down the sail. There was no wind, she whispered. The wind would come again to-morrow. She hauled down the sail, unbent it, and hoisted the bare yard up again. Rolling the sail into a pillow, she placed it at the foot of the mast, laid her head upon it, clasped her baby to her emaciated bosom and closed her eyes. Widder Wyning slept. Her frail boat was now far out at sea. It drifted farther and farther. It drifted into the Gulf Stream, and it drifted with the Gulf Stream. Morning after morning the sun rose, evening after evening the sun set. But Widder Wyning slept on and on. The sea-bird with its melancholy cry swooped over her, but Widder Wyning did not hear. Night after night the calm, eternal stars looked down upon her, but Widder Wyning did not see. The

storm raged about her, and in the darkness of night the steamboat thundered perilously near, but Widow Wyning did not heed. She slept on and on and on. Northward ever northward did the frail bark drift; northward, ever northward, to the silent regions of darkness and desolation and death; northward, to the regions where no sea-bird ever sails, where no seaweed ever grows. But poor Widder Wyning still slept on. All silvered by ice, and foot by foot forced up by ice, aloft the frail craft towered at last far above the dreary waste of broken floes, flashing in the fitful splendor of the Arctic night like a silver cross divinely jeweled and divinely poised. The adventurous mariner beheld it from afar, and seeing in it clearly a sign from Heaven took heart of grace, and turned with a lightened soul to his melancholy toil. The trembling



Eskimo mother crept forth from her hole, and pointed it out to her awe-struck child. And long afterward a solitary Eskimo hunter, waiting patiently by a hole in the ice for a seal, was startled by something which fluttered softly into his face, and then settled lightly on the snow at his feet. It was a faded and frayed piece of tinder-like ribbon, which had once been a little pink bow.

**THE END.**







